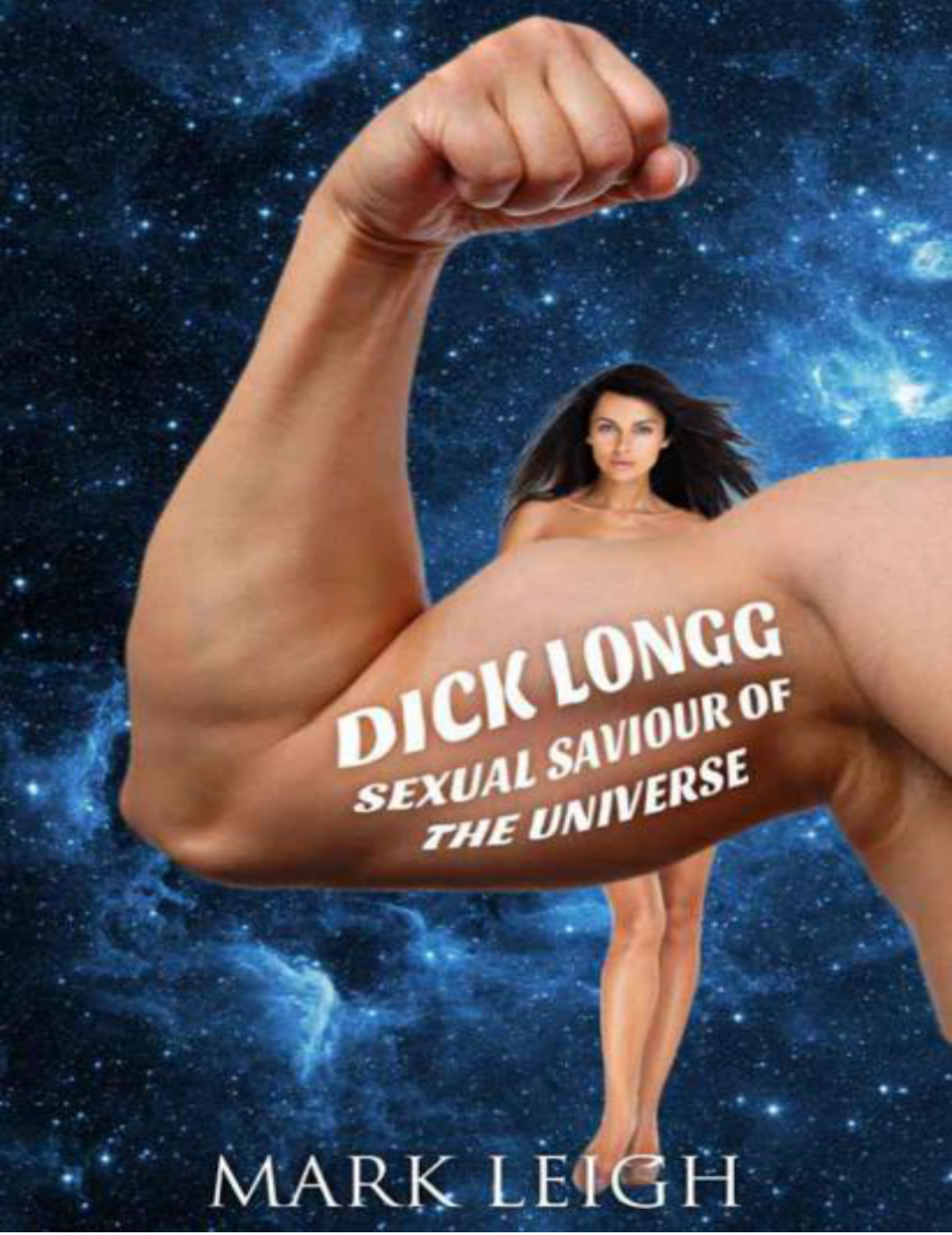
DICK LONGG
SEXUAL SAVIOUR OF
THE UNIVERSE
MARK LEIGH

SHOUT
SHARE
IT

Annotation

"1984 meets *Debbie Does Dallas.*"

Dick Longg is one of the most energetic and in-demand adult film stars in Hollywood. A man who has everything. Women, money, fame. His life is complete — and lived only for himself.

Until one day a woman from the future suddenly materialises in front of him pleading desperately for his help.

She has travelled back in time 2050.

A powerful cabal known as the New Victorians have imposed their puritanical values on society. Sexual feelings are repressed and impure thoughts purged before they can be acted upon. It is Dick's worse nightmare — a future where the only thing stiff is an upper lip.

A reluctant Dick is forced to travel to this future where he becomes a member of the resistance movement with an invented past and a new identity. His fight, however, is not just with the ruthless government; he has to wage a constant battle against his rampant libido, which would reveal his true self.

Dick Long: Sexual Saviour of The Universe is a brilliantly funny sci-fi comedy thriller — certain to appeal to fans of comedy, science fiction and adventure stories.

- Mark Leigh
  - CHAPTER 1
  - CHAPTER 2
  - CHAPTER 3
  - CHAPTER 4
  - CHAPTER 5
  - CHAPTER 6
  - CHAPTER 7
  - CHAPTER 8
  - CHAPTER 9
  - CHAPTER 10
  - CHAPTER 11
  - CHAPTER 12
  - CHAPTER 13
  - CHAPTER 14
  - CHAPTER 15
  - CHAPTER 16
  - CHAPTER 17
  - CHAPTER 18
  - CHAPTER 19

- CHAPTER 20
- CHAPTER 21
- CHAPTER 22
- CHAPTER 23
- CHAPTER 24
- CHAPTER 25
- CHAPTER 26
- CHAPTER 27
- CHAPTER 28
- CHAPTER 29
- CHAPTER 30
- CHAPTER 31
- CHAPTER 32
- CHAPTER 33
- About the Author
- Copyright

Mark Leigh
DICK LONGG
Sexual Saviour of the Universe

CHAPTER 1

Dick S. Longg? Of course, that wasn't his real name.

That was Harvey Pupkiss.

You got someone called Harvey Pupkiss to submit your tax return, take out an impacted wisdom tooth or perform stand-up in a New York comedy club. You didn't get someone called Harvey Pupkiss to fuck women on camera, which is why Harvey changed his name. The 'S' as his middle initial? That followed in the grand tradition of Ulysses S. Grant, Harry S. Truman and Hunter S. Thompson, although in Dick's case it stood for 'Schlong'. The usual response on hearing this was, 'Dick Schlong Longg? That's a mouthful!'

And indeed it was.

As one of the best endowed, most accomplished porn stars in L.A, if not the world, Dick's sideboard groaned under the weight of his ten Golden Clitorises, eighteen Dildos and the coveted Palme d'Orgasm — not forgetting his lifetime achievement award for oral sex, the 'Linda'. If there was an industry award or accolade to be won, then Dick had won it. What's more, he wasn't ashamed of calling himself a porn star unlike many of his more pretentious colleagues who talked about being in the 'Adult Entertainment Industry'. To Dick, this was like calling a vibrator an 'oscillating internal cavity stimulatory device'.

Success meant he really did have it all. There was the 6,000 sq. ft. duplex apartment overlooking the San Fernando Valley complete with two hot tubs, one very hot tub and one tub the exact same temperature of amniotic fluid. He owned a lemon yellow Ferrari 430 and a midnight black Hummer H2 (with the vanity plate 'Humongous'), plus a stunning beachfront holiday home in Aruba.

But apart from all the trappings of wealth Dick enjoyed other non-financial benefits; the endless stream of lithe, busty women that came into his life as much as he came into theirs. With his reputation preceding him and his rugged good looks (think 'Owen Wilson' but a bit taller and without the broken nose), Dick found picking up women as simple as getting a hard-on. In his line of work beautiful women were easy to meet and generally easy, and they all seemed cast from the same mould. These were women who'd spent more time French polishing their nails than they had in full-time education; who moved their lips while they read TV Guide, and who still insisted on drawing a smiley face or flower as a dot for the letter 'i' (or lower case 'j'). While they made great bed mates they couldn't make great conversation but that didn't bother Dick. He was more interested in what went on between the sheets than between their ears. All Dick

wanted was instant gratification, not a girlfriend.

Sure, on the face of it, if this is what you want from life then porn seems like exactly the right business to be in: being paid to be filmed having sex with a wide variety of stunning women. In reality though, the novelty rapidly wears off and the whole thing quickly turns into Just Another Job. Well, maybe that's overstating it a bit since most jobs don't involve you being intimate with three different beautiful girls simultaneously, two of them ex-Playmates of the Year and the other a 19-year-old Ukrainian gymnast — but you get the point.

Dick had been asked about this time after time in interviews; how can he enjoy sex that must be mechanical, almost a reflex act rather than anything undertaken with great consideration, let alone passion? Dick didn't mind this at all and had gone on record saying that unlike many celebrities, he was totally fulfilled doing what he did best. He had no interest in doing anything more worthy with his life, whether it was helping displaced Somalian refugees, campaigning to stop the deforestation of the Amazon delta or saving the white tufted orang utan. Well, with millions in the bank and an unfeasibly large sex organ, he thought, why would you?

His penis? It's fair to say that Dick had become particularly blasé about it. To him, his endowment was, quite literally, a tool of his trade and unlike most of his rivals, he could always be relied upon to perform on cue without any artificial stimulants or aids. If you know anything about the porn industry at all, then you know the most important thing for any male performer is his ability, as they say in the business, to 'get wood'. Dick could get wood on demand and not just your lowly balsa or ply; we're talking about the mighty oak or majestic redwood.

His unique physiology meant he had absolutely no need for Viagra, Cialis, Stonkodextrin, ErectoMore, Whang-Gel, acupuncture, hypnosis, vacuum pumps, rubber bands or even the inflatable penile implants that several of his colleagues were rumoured to rely on. In fact, it was said that Dick's penis was so dependable you could set your watch by it, although this would of course have been a very odd, and a considerably unhygienic thing to do.

Dick's first paid job was in The Bitches of East Dick, a poorly-produced film in which there was an inverse relationship between the size of his fee and the size of his manhood. Dick wasn't happy, but understood that that sort of exploitation came with the territory. He knew he had to pay his dues on the way to becoming a serious player. Within a few months he was being offered roles in better produced, better financed movies including Laying Private Ryan, Thighs Wide Shut and Schindler's Fist, and was soon getting both a fee and a small

percentage of net.

The physical demands of the job and a propensity for early burn-out meant the life of a porn star was relatively short, falling somewhere between that of a May fly and a boy band. That's why, to maximise his future earnings Dick made the move into production; that's where the money was.

The first films he wrote, produced and starred in were a series of porno bible exploitation films: Go Down Moses, Resurrection, The Second Coming and the most controversial of all, Mary Does Bethlehem. These caused a real stir in the market and also among the god-fearing folk of America's mid-west. There were mass burnings of his movies in Des Moines, Wichita, Oshkosh and numerous other silly-sounding places but this, quite literally, just fanned the flames of publicity; it was especially helpful because to enable them to burn his DVDs, angry citizens had to buy them first. A combination of the earnings form this series and the fact that Dick was one of the few performers in the industry whose income didn't disappear up his nose enabled him to buy up a small distribution business. The rest, as authors who like using clichés say, is history.

Nowadays Dick made the films he wanted to, working with the cast and crew he liked and trusted. OK, 'liked' was too strong a word; 'tolerated' was probably better. He hired them for their professional skills and ability to get the job done in time and on budget. Their personalities and egos? Well, he accepted those as well. Although 'suffered' would be far more appropriate.

Most people in the porn industry acted like they were serious actors. One particular girl Dick had worked with had a laughable sense of self-importance, behaving as if she was the Meryl Streep of the blow job. In reality the only thing she and her famous namesake had in common were that they'd both appeared in films called Sophie's Choice, although one was about a concentration camp survivor and one was about a gangbang. Most directors also suffered from a similar sense of inappropriate self-worth and Dick was currently working with one of these. Ron DiBargi was a larger than life character that would never tire of telling people how he learned his craft in the film biz while working for Scorsese and Coppola. What Ron failed to tell anyone of course was that he was referring to Sal Scorsese and Mario Coppola who ran an adult movie theatre on 42nd Street in the late 1970s. Ron had been their projectionist.

This particular day Dick was working with Ron on the set of Thrust 'Til You Bust, the last of the awesomely successful Phallus In Wonderland trilogy that Dick had created. It was being filmed in a mansion that was as tastelessly decorated as it was cavernous. Dick was just finishing the de-rigueur jacuzzi scene with his co-star Alpine

Peaks, having successfully negotiated his way around her every orifice. Three times. (Actually, he wasn't sure whether technically an ear constituted an orifice but he thought 'What the hell!' and went for it anyway). Dick had worked with Alpine many times since she was one of the few porn actresses who could match his sexual stamina as well as having a remarkable vaginal capacity. Despite this, he still managed to bring tears to her eyes at the same time as a smile to her lips. With a final groan and a grunt he delivered the coup de grace — or what the industry euphemistically refers to as the 'money shot'. Dick certainly shot something over Alpine and although it wasn't money, he knew he gave his viewers great value.

'OK… and cut!', Ron yelled, adding, 'After those close-ups check there's no hair in the gate!'.

The crew cracked up. It might have been the oldest gag on the porn film set but it never failed to get a laugh. Partly, Dick thought, to relieve the tension but mainly, he felt, to relieve the boredom.

'All clear!' came the camera operator's reply moments after he'd watched the playback.

'Great work people. It's a wrap', shouted Ron. 'Take a break everyone but be back in twenty for the re-shoot of Mojo's scene. And make sure no one spooks the friggin' monkey this time!'. Turning to Dick Ron added, 'Another great performance Dick. Don't know how you keep it up!'

Cue more laughter from the crew. Dick found this joke funny the first time but after hearing it for the two hundred and eighty-first time it was wearing as thin as an ultra-lite gossamer condom. And if that wasn't annoying enough, Ron finished the sentence by making a gun with his fingers and pointing it at Dick, simultaneously winking and making a clicking noise. Dick hated it when anyone did that. Really hated it. After all, it was his *own* signature greeting. Returning the gesture out of politeness, Dick took his robe from one of the smiling fluffers at the side of the set, whose services he had never, ever required, and strolled to his luxurious trailer parked on the driveway for a well-earned rest. Letting the door close gently behind him Dick grabbed a bottle of chilled Cristal from the table, running his forefinger up its cool, slender neck before slowly filling an elegant champagne flute. After taking a particularly long and satisfying sip of the nectar of the gods (as Dick called it) he felt exceptionally mellow and sank into a very forgiving soft white leather couch.

The trailer was Dick's refuge, his sanctuary and, save for the soothing hum of the air conditioner, his Quiet Place. Moments of nothingness like this had to be savoured. Dick had a gruelling schedule that made most Third World training shoe factory workers look like slackers. He had six more scenes to shoot that day including

the double penetration climax where, through post-production trickery, he played both himself and his clone (a first in porn films and a sure-fire award winner).

The day after that he was jetting off to the Florida Keys for two days to shoot Key Large-O, and then up to New Orleans to film Mardi Gras Gang Bang (subtitle: 'the biggest blow job since Hurricane Katrina'). Then it was back to L.A. to check the final edit of Thrust. Dick thought he had time off after that but he couldn't be sure, but the day after he had to be in Vegas to make a personal appearance at Sexpo, the sex industry's annual trade show. Here he hoped to sign a deal with a new Asian film distributor. Apparently Dick was 'big in Japan' but then that didn't surprise him at all.

Lying here, savouring the soothing effects of the champagne, Dick closed his eyes and thought back to his youth when porn was something found under your dad's bed rather than a career choice. He'd been big for his age throughout childhood but in those carefree days he'd learned about his endowment the hard way; that as well as being a novelty it could also be a liability. At junior high an embarrassing 'Show and Tell' session resulted in his suspension and subsequent transfer. The same thing happened at high school after it was discovered he'd been charging friends of both sexes to see it in order to supplement his allowance. Dick was more appreciated at college. After his first semester he'd bedded twenty-eight different girls and three female teachers including the vice principal. Needless to say, he graduated *cum laude*.

Immediately afterwards Dick landed a job in the 'legitimate' film industry, in the marketing & publicity department of a large Hollywood studio. One of his tasks was writing the taglines for film posters, the pithy slogans that sell the premise of the movie. Dick had been quite adept at this; his favourite was his work on 'Colorways', a gangster thriller set in the world of interior design ('Today it's soft furnishings but tomorrow it's curtains!'). Even though movie marketing wasn't the most challenging job in the world Dick had been quite content trying to make a career out of it. It was only due to an ex-girlfriend who knew a cameraman who knew a make-up artist who knew a producer who knew a casting agent who knew a director who knew a golden opportunity when he saw it, that he'd got into the whole porn thing. (NB. In case you're wondering, the term 'knew' *is* used in the biblical sense).

As Dick continued reminiscing, a woman appeared. Normally this wouldn't be unusual but on this particular occasion it was, since she materialised right out of thin air accompanied by the sound of static, the sweet, sickly smell of ozone and the more pleasant odour of rose-scented perfume. The severe shock caused Dick to temporarily lose

both his voice and his balance and he fell off the couch. He tried to compose himself and say, ‘Who are you and what do you want?’ but all that came forth from his lips was a rather high pitched, garbled, ‘Hoowhayoowan?’.

The woman however, was far more composed. She looked Dick straight in the eye and introduced herself with a cut glass English accent.

‘Mr. Longg, my name is Alice. I’ve come here from the year 2150’.

CHAPTER 2

There's something very disconcerting about a woman materialising right in front of you. It's even more alarming when the woman who's doing the materialising tells you that she's from the future.

Dick looked her up and down. Alice was in her mid-twenties, attractive with an ample bosom but any hint of sexuality was being inhibited by a starched white blouse buttoned up to her slender, pale neck and a voluminous dark brown-coloured corduroy skirt that concealed any suggestion of the rest of her figure. Her skin looked like fine porcelain giving the impression that if you pushed her over, she'd break. She carried a rather formal-looking suede bag and the overall impression was one of a prim and proper Victorian nanny. For the second time in as many minutes Dick's mouth made random shapes but failed to form any recognisable words. Alice took advantage of this situation, as she knew it wouldn't be long before Dick regained the power of speech and/or movement and either called security or seduced her. Either way she would fail in her mission and time was of the essence.

'Mr. Longg', she continued, by now crouching over him as he remained prone. 'My sudden appearance here has put us both in very grave danger. I need you to listen to what I have to say. My story will, no doubt, seem very far-fetched but please hear me out'.

As the mysterious woman spoke, Dick began to regain his composure and his motor skills. He hadn't been this spooked since that fateful day during filming three years ago when he lost his erection after only fifty minutes although in his defence, he had been suffering from both a bad case of debilitating flu *and* from being accidentally kneed in the testicles in a previous orgy scene. Slowly getting up up, Dick reached for the bottle of chilled champagne.

'Mr. Longg!'

'Call me Dick', he responded, unsubtly opening his robe a little.

'I must have your full attention!', Alice commanded, looking at him sternly. 'Are you aware of H G Wells?'.

'Of course I have. Everyone knows Harry Wells, the director of "Forest Hump" and "Saturday Night Beaver".'

'No! The Victorian British author'. Alice could see that this was going to take longer than she had imagined, and longer than she had.

'Ah. *That* H G Wells', Dick nodded, faking his knowledge of nineteenth century literary greats. 'Yes, I am aware of his work'.

Alice didn't believe him for one minute and sighed. 'He wrote "The War of the Worlds".'

‘“The Whore of the Worlds”? I starred in that!’

Alice ignored him. ‘“The Shape of Things To Come…”’

‘I was in that one too!’

It was all Alice could do to stop herself slapping him. Instead, she grabbed the lapels of his robe and drew him to within a few inches of her face.

‘“The Time Machine…”’

‘I wasn’t in…’

‘Don’t say anything!’ Alice exclaimed. ‘Wells published it in 1896 but it wasn’t just science fiction; it was a story very much inspired by fact. You see, a small, select group of his contemporaries were more technologically advanced than we ever knew…’ Pausing for effect she continued, ‘They had actually developed time travel!’

Alice momentarily relaxed her grip and Dick took this opportunity to pull himself away and register his scepticism.

‘Whoa! Hold on lady. I don’t know lots of things but one thing I do know is that time travel is impossible. It belongs in books and in movies!’

‘Believe me, Mr. Longg. It’s true. Time travel *was* invented’, Alice said in a very matter-of-fact-everyone-knows-that sort of way.

‘Sure. And you’re saying it was developed by some uptight old Victorian guys in stuffy suits, top hats, brogues and gold watches on chains?’

‘Precisely. That’s *how* I’m here. And it’s *why* I’m here!’

Dick was unimpressed. Confused as well, but more unimpressed than confused.

‘Look lady, you’d better go before I call security’, he said. ‘Why are you telling me all this? I don’t know who you are or what you want…’

Alice pulled Dick towards her once more. ‘I want you!’, she replied with more than a hint of desperation in her voice.

‘Yeah, right’, Dick responded. ‘Tell me something I haven’t heard a million times before’.

Alice continued forcefully. ‘Please hear me out, I implore you. Suspend your disbelief for a while and assume that what I am telling you is absolutely true’.

Dick groaned. It was a groan that implied ‘I'm bored and want to end this conversation and get back to filming’, rather than a groan he might have emitted while being fondled with a sable glove or having low-fat raspberry yoghourt licked off his testicles. However, Alice’s sudden appearance, her clothing and the garbage she was spouting intrigued him and Dick decided to give her the benefit of the doubt. Well, for a short time anyway.

‘You’ve got one minute’, he told her firmly, ‘and not a second

more'. Dick looked down at the Rolex Submariner on his wrist before realising he wasn't wearing it. He sighed.

Seated on the couch, maintaining a safe distance from Dick, Alice continued with an even greater sense of urgency. 'My home, the Great Britain of 2150, is a totalitarian state. It's governed by the descendants of this cabal of businessmen, scientists, industrialists and politicians from the 1890s who developed time travel and transported themselves one hundred and fifty years into the future where they established a new society'. Dick went to open his lips but Alice interrupted him.

'I know what you're about to ask… how did a few influential men change society so radically and so quickly?'.

In truth, that wasn't what Dick wasn't going to ask. That question would have been too insightful for him, but it gave Alice the chance to explain what had happened in the future — and a way for this author to sneak in some exposition without it appearing too contrived. In any case, the reasons *how* and *why* certain Victorian gentlemen time-travelled to the year 2046 is not that important. It's a MacGuffin. You know, a plot device like the actual Maltese Falcon in the film of the same name or the stolen money in Psycho. *What* these Victorian gentlemen did, however, is key to this story and far, far more important. Anyway, for the sake of both Dick and those readers who want some background information, Alice explained what had happened.

'The facts are imprecise', she said. 'Much of the history of that time is unclear and that which does exist, has almost certainly been re-written. However, what we *can* deduce is that soon after this group of men travelled to the future, they infiltrated the top echelons of British society, eventually forming a new political party while keeping their identities and origins a complete secret'.

Dick frowned the sort of frown a kitten makes as it paws at a mouse on a television screen. Noting his reaction, Alice decided to keep the explanation simple.

'By 2050, society was in decline and family life was being eroded. Crime was rising, particularly among the young, and there was a general lack of respect and discipline. Political parties were indistinguishable. Polices were weak and bland. Their leaders were anonymous, spineless and lacklustre. The public wanted change and they embraced the so-called 'New Victorians' and their manifesto of good family values, law and order, a strong work ethic and a willingness to help the less fortunate. They had a charismatic leader who achieved almost celebrity status. What started as a popular movement for reform soon developed into a full grown political party that swept into power — and which has been the ruling the country in various forms for the last hundred years or so'.

Dick was half listening to Alice and half counting to himself, trying to work out if a minute had passed. He thought it had.

'There's virtually no opposition to their policies and the Party, as they're known, run Great Britain as a sort of benevolent dictatorship. Their current leader is a mysterious man who is rarely seen in public'. Alice halted her explanation and stared at Dick. By the way he was mouthing numbers it was obvious he wasn't paying full attention. Alice gave him the slap round the face she had recently resisted and which she felt he now deserved.

'Listen to what I'm saying', she pleaded. 'I live in this world. A world shaped by Victorian ethics and morals!'.

By now Dick had given up trying to count in his head and was considering what Alice had said.

'Is that so bad?', he enquired, mainly out of politeness as he still didn't believe a single word Alice was saying.

'Well not all of it. As I said, we live by strong values… but there's also a downside. The Party don't believe in promiscuity or relationships out of wedlock. They claim it contributes to the ruin of society'.

Alice paused again for dramatic effect. 'The result is that there is virtually no sex'.

If Dick's disbelief had been suspended, it just came crashing back down rather heavily. Now Alice had his full and undivided attention. A world without sex? It wasn't worth thinking about. And it definitely wasn't worth living in.

'I can't believe that!', Dick said, slightly distraught. 'You're making it up'.

'I wish I was', said Alice sadly. 'Some of us know from surviving fragments of your history how it used to be. In my world the Party have imposed their puritanical attitude towards sex on everyone and since the current leader came to power about three years ago it's become far worse. Now, most sexual feeling is repressed and that which does take place is only permitted amongst married couples on a weekly basis. Monthly bromide injections to suppress desire are mandatory. Impure thoughts are not allowed to become impure deeds'.

'Man, I'm glad I'm not living there!', Dick said anxiously.

'But you will be', added Alice nonchalantly, removing from her bag some sort of electronic bracelet with green pulsating lights similar to one she was wearing. 'You see, I've come here to take you back. Or rather, forward. I'm part of a resistance movement which has been trying to overthrow the Party and we need your help'.

'Me?', asked Dick incredulously. 'Why me? I'm a top porn star. I'm a lover not a fighter!'

‘You have been chosen, that’s all I know. Someone very influential in my time has said that you are ‘The One’’.

‘I’m very flattered, lady but I’m not going anywhere with you’. Dick was not only adamant, he was also angry. ‘Do I think you’re from the future? No way! And even if I did, do I want to live in a future without sex. Never! Do I want to help bring down your government? Of course not! Why would I want to give up everything I’ve got here? Everything I’ve worked for! I’m going back on set and suggest you go back to wherever you came from, whether it’s the future, or more probably, the asylum!’

‘But Mr. Longg!’, Alice implored, ‘We don’t have much time! As soon as I arrived here the Party would have detected a disturbance in the time vortex wormhole continuum and would have sent agents to hunt me down!’

For a split second Dick considered asking about the time vortex wormhole continuum, but then thought better of it and instead started to leave. As he headed towards the door he turned back. ‘It was good meeting you. Have a nice day’.

Alice lunged and grabbed his arm forcefully. ‘Stop! Let me tell you a bit more about my world. Just hear me out, I beg you. Please! Then you’ll see how desperate I am’.

Desperate wasn’t a word Dick associated with her. Insane, yes, as in ‘one hooker short of an orgy’, but desperate, no.

‘All right’, he said, humouring her and shaking loose her hand, which was now beginning to hurt. ‘You’ve got one more minute’. Dick looked down again at his watch that wasn’t there, and sighed.

CHAPTER 3

Alice reached into her bag once more and handed Dick what looked like a bulky pair of ornate opera glasses attached to something that resembled an old leather-flying helmet.

'Mr. Longg,' said Alice with a hint of panic in her voice. 'Please put these on so you can see the world I live in. Time is of the essence'.

Dick examined the eyeglasses and asked sarcastically, 'What are these? Seven by thirty-fives? Eight by forties? They don't look powerful enough to see across the Valley, let alone into the future'.

'Mr. Longg, this is a virtual reality device which will enable you to have a glimpse into my life and my world. You can control where you go and what you see'.

'I've done this before', Dick said brusquely. 'You're not talking to an amateur!'

He carefully put the headset on and adjusted the eyepieces until they were comfortable. An image momentarily flickered in and out of focus before stabilising; an image of what Dick assumed was meant to be a city street in Alice's time. Dick thought it looked pretty much how you'd imagine the year 2150 to look. Sleek glass and steel high-rise buildings, an elevated modern subway and wide streets full of streamlined cars that hovered just above the ground. As Dick moved his head, his point of view also changed. By leaning forward slightly he walked forward in his virtual reality world. When he leaned back slightly, he stopped.

'Cool!', Dick commented. He'd seen this sort of set-up before in a virtual sex game where the participant could take part in a whole variety of different, and very realistic, scenarios. Two years ago a well-known Japanese computer games manufacturer had asked Dick to endorse their new product and invited him to view a demonstration. In front of a roomful of their senior management and the proud company CEO, Dick tried one of the prototypes. After examining the electronic menu he selected a programme where he would be enjoying virtual sex with a silicon-enhanced brunette spread-eagled on a revolving circular bed. To Dick's immense surprise he found himself on the bed but sodomising a stocky blond man with a hairy back and bushy moustache. The games company execs blamed a 'bug' and were very, very apologetic (although Dick was certain he caught some of them smirking and was sure one of them left the room to laugh). Despite the experience just being virtual, Dick felt extremely queasy afterwards and needed a series of cold showers followed by whole body exfoliation before he felt well enough to enter into any more discussions with the manufacturers. When contact did

eventually resume it was just one-way; Dick telling them to fuck off.

He shuddered at these recollections but noted how Alice's virtual reality system seemed much more impressive and realistic. It seemed like he was actually in the year 2150, which he knew of course, couldn't be the case. One thing perplexed him though. The fashions seemed antiquated and out of kilter with this vision of the future. The women tended to wear unflattering clothes like Alice while the men wore conservative suits and sported beards or moustaches that were so ridiculous-looking they could have come straight out of a 1970's porn film.

The quality of the image and the detail he saw made Dick wonder how Alice had managed to make this whole scenario look as authentic as it did. But then he remembered where he was, not a million miles from the land of make believe and endless studio back lots where this could have been filmed. Fashion was one thing but how did Alice fake the cars hovering above the ground? Then he remembered how Luke Skywalker's sand speeder did exactly the same in Star Wars, and that was over 30 years earlier. It wouldn't be that difficult to imitate. These special effects may have been costly but that only proved that Alice wasn't just mentally unstable and deluded; she was mentally unstable, deluded and rich. But one thing still bugged Dick. He couldn't figure out why she'd gone to all these lengths. What did she intend to gain?

These thoughts had caused Dick's concentration to wander but he re-focussed on the images that played out before him, leaning slightly forward to enable him to walk along the virtual street before turning to enter a large virtual bookshop. Here he made his way along various aisles and soon found himself in the very-well stocked periodicals section. Out of curiosity and force of habit he looked for the adult magazines to see what porn of the future looked like (and although he would never admit it, Dick was secretly hoping for some mention of him in a retrospective feature). The strange thing was that he had trouble finding any adult magazines at all.

After looking along the top shelf he looked at the next shelf down, and the next shelf down after that, but failed to find any porn there too. In fact he looked along every single shelf from eye-level, to thigh-level to, er, well, ankle level and on all of them, adult publications were notable by their absence. The most arousing magazine on display turned out to be the swimwear edition of 'Sports Illustrated', except in this case the swimwear was baggy, one-piece bathing suits that covered the whole body apart from the hands, feet and head (although even the head was partially covered by a frilly bathing cap).

Slightly confused, Dick walked out to see if he'd entered some Church of the Latter Day Saints Book Shop, or whether Borders was

now owned by the Taliban or Amish, but could find evidence of neither. He continued down the virtual street and reached a busy intersection where a huge video screen mounted on the side of a monolithic building caught his eye. It was broadcasting what appeared to be some sort of public service health advertisement. At first Dick thought it was warning about the dangers of VD or AIDS but it was only after he'd watched the whole commercial that the penny dropped. The pallid looking young man who had lost his girl, his job, his self-esteem and the respect of his entire family was not suffering from a sexually-transmitted infection. He had been caught masturbating. A society with no pornography was one thing but criminalising masturbation was quite another. This future had no place for anyone like Dick Longg. This world that Alice was presenting as her own made Orwell's 'Big Brother' look like a jovial uncle. But then Dick asked himself why he was getting upset over a prank film; some sort of scam that Alice was obviously pulling. With a mixture of horror, disgust and annoyance (and a little bit of nervousness thrown in for good measure) Dick ripped the headset off and thrust it back at Alice.

'It's not a nice world is it?' she asked rhetorically.

'OK. You've had your chance. I don't know how you pulled that stunt but I admit the effects are pretty good', Dick told her. 'Now just supposing your whole future deal is right, and you really have come back in time — which I must say, can never, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, *ever* be the case — you're asking me to give up everything I've got here; my career, my luxurious, exciting lifestyle including my Hummer and my 60 inch plasma TV, to travel to your time to bring down a whole government and risk being killed, or worse, being rendered impotent by injection as soon as I arrive — and that's before I even start fighting for your so-called resistance organisation!'

Dick was on a roll. The last time he felt this animated about anything was when he campaigned for the establishment of the Adult Film Actors Guild. He'd led the fight to set up this union for porn stars to stop them being exploited and also devised its motto, 'Let the actors do the screwing, not the film companies!' (his only regret was the union's unfortunate acronym which he hadn't foreseen but by then all the stationery had been printed).

Dick reached for the door handle. 'Lady, the decision you're asking me to make is such a no-brainer… that… that… even someone without a brain wouldn't need to think twice about it! I'm going back on set and suggest that you make yourself scarce as soon as I've gone or I will definitely call security!'

Opening the door of the trailer, Dick stepped out. As soon as he surveyed the set and thought about the next scene with Alpine he was

instantly aroused. ‘A world without sex?’ he thought to himself. ‘It really doesn’t bear further consideration!’

Dick was walking towards Ron when he heard the exact same noise that occurred when Alice appeared in his trailer, immediately followed by the exact same smell (but not the rose-scented perfume part). If he was surprised when Alice materialised then he was totally dumbfounded when two smartly dressed top-hatted gentlemen appeared out of thin air to his right. He was astounded when one of them raised his arm and fired some sort of pistol at Ron that emitted both a loud, popping noise and a concentrated beam of blue light. The first beam grazed Ron’s shoulder but was powerful enough to spin him around. Another loud ‘pop’ and the second blast caught his upper body. Ron grimaced, screaming the scream of someone you knew would scream no more. He collapsed to his knees and rolled over on the floor, a three-inch hole smouldering in his chest. The whole thing happened in slow motion. Or maybe it just appeared that way as Ron was so heavy-set and lumbering, any progress he made seemed to be in slow motion whatever speed he actually moved at. Although Dick wasn’t sure exactly what had happened he sensed that the rest of the day’s filming was in serious jeopardy.

His first thought was that one of Ron’s many enemies had decided it was payback time. Ron had made many errors of judgement in his time and although he wasn’t homosexual himself, had produced a series of exploitation films in the 80s including ‘The Gay Godfather’, ‘Mafia Fags’ and ‘Cosa Nostra Queers’. These had made him an awful lot of money but also an awful lot of people of Italian descent who wanted him whacked. Dick knew that a lot of Ron’s enemies had threatened to tear him ‘a second asshole’ but he was sure that whoever had just shot him wasn’t one of them, if only because anyone with even the most rudimentary medical knowledge knew that no one would tear you a ‘second asshole’ in the middle of your chest.

Although his mind was numbed by these sudden events Dick was certain that these two strange men who’d just killed his director were somehow connected with Alice. The two visitors fired their weapons several times again. There was that same sound and the same blue rays that shot across the set. The smell of seared flesh filled the air and the cries of people with the seared flesh rang out. The loudest screams belonged to Alpine Peaks as one of the beams scored a direct hit on her right breast. That was the moment that Dick realised that a) silicon implants are highly flammable, and that b) his life was in mortal danger unless he took immediate cover. He jumped back through the door of his trailer and cowered down in a corner next to a crouching Alice. In one fluid move she grabbed his arm, locked the strange bracelet around his wrist and simultaneously pushed a button

on hers. At the same time, in one fluid move of his own, Dick grabbed the chilled bottle of Cristal. A split second later a blast rocked the trailer and it disintegrated.

But in that split second Alice and Dick had vanished.

They appeared again, much to Dick's astonishment and panic (Dick later learned that time travelling technology was never 100% reliable) but then disappeared a microsecond later.

This time for good.

CHAPTER 4

Dick was never a good traveller. He was sick when he filmed 'Titanic' on board that cruise liner. He was sick when he had sex on that locomotive in 'Screw Momma On The Train'. He was even sick when he got that blowjob driving a limo during the making of 'Riding Miss Daisy' (and if something's going to upset the ambience of a sex scene, then vomiting will). When Dick did eventually re-materialise six thousand miles and 140 years away it was with the accompaniment of severe nausea and acute stomach cramps. He hadn't thrown-up but felt like he really, really wanted to. Instead, Dick crawled around on all fours, farted twice, dry-retched six times, and did a more than passable impersonation of a cat with a fur ball. This was definitely not the sort of impression that anyone would want to give their hosts from the future.

Eventually Dick stopped making noises that sounded like the Devil with laryngitis talking backwards. He regained his composure to see he was in a room that resembled some sort of comfortable lounge with traditional wood panelling, leather wing-backed chairs and a roaring fire. Had he travelled through time? His new surroundings definitely didn't give that impression but those men on the set with guns and his sudden disappearance and reappearance here… Something really odd had definitely taken place.

As Dick continued to look around he realised he had absolutely no idea where he was or how he got there. For the moment anyway, until he could figure it out, Dick decided to play it safe and go along with Alice's bizarre charade. He stood up, a bit unsteady at first, to see a few people looking at him, including Alice. It soon dawned on Dick that these spectators weren't, in fact, looking at him — they were staring. Dick was still trying to work out why, when Alice stepped towards him and whispered something in his ear. He looked down to see his robe was undone. Whatever ill-effect this apparent time travel had on him, the ability to have and maintain an erection was not one of them. Coughing awkwardly, Dick put down the bottle of champagne that he was still holding and secured his robe. He was spared further embarrassment by a tall, distinguished-looking silver-haired man in his early fifties who stepped forward and broke the awkward silence.

'Good day Mr. Longg, My name is Taylor. Welcome to the year 2150'. He shook Dick's hand warmly. 'I am the leader of the Resistance and these are our senior members'. He gestured to Dick's audience. In addition to Alice there were two more men and another woman. Their initial shock had been replaced by friendly smiles all

round.

Taylor continued, ‘You’ll meet everyone properly later, meanwhile they all have jobs to do’. Taking this hint everyone murmured their goodbyes and left the room.

Taylor sat down in one of the leather armchairs and indicated that Dick should join him. ‘Now I know what you’re thinking…’, he said, gesturing around him. ‘That this doesn’t look very much like the headquarters of a resistance movement’.

That was actually the second thing Dick was thinking. The first was whether he could get Alice into bed but he decided to keep that particular thought to himself.

‘Er, yeah, that’s right’, Dick agreed, going along with this whole time travel / resistance movement thing until he figured out exactly where he was and could plan his escape.

Dick did have pre-conceived ideas as to what a resistance HQ should look like and on the evidence of his current surroundings this certainly didn’t resemble one. Dick expected to see a whole room full of elaborate monitoring equipment. Another where members underwent hand-to-hand combat training. A firing range. Some sort of laboratory or workshop where all types of weapons were invented and tested. A place where missions were intricately planned and then briefed. And a room with a huge glass screen in the middle where enemy movements were plotted and tracked with intricate precision while everyone looks stern. He knew a lot of his ideas were based on what he’d seen in movies but despite this, he was sure a resistance movement HQ should not resemble a room in a private gentleman’s club.

A cynical Dick voiced his doubts. ‘How do I know I’m really in the future and actually in your headquarters? For all I know I could have been drugged or knocked unconscious and just taken from the set to a house somewhere in Beverly Hills’.

Taylor grinned. ‘And why would we have done that Mr. Longg?’, he asked.

Dick collected his thoughts for a few seconds before answering. ‘Maybe you know my worth as a top porn star and you’re going to hold me hostage in a locked, darkened room or a deep pit until someone pays a multi-million dollar ransom’.

Taylor frowned but let Dick continue without interruption. ‘Or I’m here because you’re going to kill me and use my skin to make a cape that you can swan around in and say, “Hey everyone, look at me. I’m wearing the skin of Dick S. Longg, aren’t I mad and glamorous”. Or maybe you lost your penis in a gardening accident and I’m here so you can transplant mine on to your stump so you can be a real man again’. By the looks he was getting Dick knew he was both clutching

at straws and fumbling for answers.

Taylor shook his head. ‘Mr. Longg, I give you my word as a gentleman that none of those reasons are even remotely true’.

Dick tried to think of more explanations. Thoughts buzzed around his cortex about his abductors wanting to truss him up and milk him like a cow, using his semen to create some sort of bio-fuel, or using fractional distillation to turn it into gold, but he thought that these were scientifically impossible as well as being plain silly. After a while Dick gave up thinking of other reasons why he was here and just frowned, chewing his bottom lip.

Taking advantage of the silence, Taylor continued. ‘Mr. Longg. Although it is, admittedly, a very difficult concept to grasp, maybe you should just accept where you are, that we are all telling the truth and we really do need your help. So much so in fact, that Alice was willing to risk her life and we were all willing to risk detection in order to bring you here’.

Dick thought back to something Alice had told him and smiled. The smile wasn’t because of what she had said, but because despite his short attention span, he was pleased he’d actually managed to remember anything she’d said at all.

‘Alice mentioned that the Party tracked her when she went back to my time’.

‘That’s right’, confirmed Taylor. ‘That’s how the two agents they sent eventually materialised in the same place as she did and tried to kill you both’.

‘But doesn’t that mean that they can now track us back here?’ Dick scared himself with this thought. His eyes darted around the room and he took on the appearance of a frightened rabbit, assuming a ridiculous-looking kung fu pose, en-guard for anyone or anything about to materialise out of thin air and kill him.

‘No’, Taylor smiled. ‘They can’t detect us now. Our headquarters is your home and your hideout until it’s safe for you to leave’.

‘And when do you think that will be?’, Dick enquired, looking around again at his strange new surroundings.

‘When you’re acclimatised to our world and trained in your mission’.

‘That would be my mission to overthrow the Party?’, Dick asked.

‘That is correct’, agreed Taylor, very matter-of-factly.

‘And why do you think I’ll be able to help you? I’m sure there are loads of people in the Resistance better and more skilled than me who know this world and what they’re up against’.

‘You flatter us Mr. Longg’, commented Taylor. ‘The Resistance is too small, too inexperienced and too under-equipped to topple the Party however we are constantly trying to frustrate or embarrass it.

We break into museums and remove the fig leaves that the Party has added to nude statues. We graffiti public spaces with anti-Party slogans, or just giant penises. We once found a cache of old inflatable sex dolls, filled them with helium, and set these adrift over London'.

Dick smiled at this very juvenile form of terrorism.

'With your help, however', Taylor continued, 'We hope to deal it a serious blow'.

'But what can I do that you can't do already? I've got no special skills. I've already told Alice that I'm a lover, not a fighter', Dick explained. 'Sure, I can give you the benefit of all my experience as an award-winning top porn star but I'm sure you didn't bring me all this way just to give you hints and tips for what makes a good video to jerk off to'.

'No', Mr. Longg, 'The reason you are here is because recent intelligence leads us to believe the Party is planning something big. Very big. We think they are developing some sort of secret weapon to use against us. You're the one man who can find out what this is and ensure they never get to use it'.

'And you really believe I can do all of that?', asked Dick dubiously.

'Mr. Longg', Taylor replied, looking him straight in the eye, 'It really doesn't matter what I think. What matters is that someone very important in the Resistance believes it'.

'And that is…' asked Dick.

'She's called The Oracle', said Taylor with due deference. 'You'll meet her shortly. In the meantime let me show you what we do here. I think you'll be impressed'.

'Whatever', Dick muttered under his breath.

As they rose, Taylor turned to Dick and said in a low, conspiratorial voice, 'Only a few key personnel in the Resistance know who you are and why you're here. We're keeping it from the rank and file members'. Dick listened intently. 'There are sound reasons for this. Firstly, the fewer people who know, the greater the chance of you, and us, remaining undetected. Secrecy, caution and a little luck have meant that the Party hasn't been able to find this location or identify any of our current members, all of whom lead respectable jobs in society, some even working under the very nose of the Party itself'. Taylor continued, 'Secondly, if I told the whole membership about you, it might raise their hopes and lull them into a false sense of optimism for the future. Even among those who knew about the plan to bring you here, there is a great expectation. One or two of them are even calling you 'The Messiah''.

Dick rather liked that comparison, until he remembered what eventually happened to the original Messiah. Then he became glum

again.

CHAPTER 5

Dick followed Taylor out of the room, down an anonymous corridor, through a door and down another featureless corridor that made the first one look positively exciting by comparison. They entered a small room where three resistance members were working. Dick recognised two of them from the lounge when he first appeared; now they were seated at a bank of electronic machines staring at a small screen and inserting and removing small silver discs.

Taylor introduced them, 'Dick, meet Susan and Edward, two of our senior members'.

'We're so glad you're here', said Susan, an attractive woman in her early thirties with deep blue eyes and full red lips. 'I've been so looking forward to meeting you'.

Edward, a dapper, serious-looking man of similar age echoed her sentiments. 'We've heard so much about you and I can't tell you how relieved we are that you're here to help us'.

Most of the compliments he received in his career were as phoney as his co-stars' breasts but this time Dick felt the fawning was genuine and refreshing to hear.

Taylor continued, 'We have quite rudimentary equipment to copy, edit and distribute pornographic films and magazines. We do this to undermine the government but they're not what you would probably consider particularly erotic. The Party were very thorough at destroying any surviving films or literature from your time that they considered "unsuitable" for society today'.

Edward interjected. 'We're having to work with a sixteenth generation copy of Emmanuelle II with no sound, and a version of Debbie Does Dallas with fifty minutes missing'.

'You don't have any of my films?', asked Dick with an obvious air of disappointment. 'I've made hundreds. Surely some must have survived?'

'There was one', admitted Edward. 'An old copy of Titty Slickers'.

'It was damaged, though', added Susan, 'and we could only salvage part of it'.

'Well even that must be better than what you're currently using', said Dick. 'Let me see what you've got'.

Susan looked past Dick to Taylor who nodded his approval. She located this particular disc and inserted it. After a few moments its contents flickered on to the small viewing screen.

'That's it?', asked Dick after less than thirty seconds.

'That's it', confirmed Susan apologetically.

'You sure?'

Susan nodded.

'Sure, sure?'

Another nod from Susan, followed by a shrug.

Dick was depressed. His legacy, and the sum total of his whole back catalogue, was just some opening titles and a ten second close-up of his naked butt. Sensing his extreme disappointment, Taylor steered Dick away and introduced him to a woman in her forties on the other side of the room who radiated what could only be described as naïve childish enthusiasm. 'Mr. Longg, this is Grace who's been working on a pornographic magazine'.

Grace blushed and said hello.

'I'm sure our guest would love to see it', prompted Taylor.

Grace hesitantly took what looked like a home-produced fanzine from a stack. 'We put this together from some photos we found', she added with a hint of pride in her voice that Dick would soon discover was totally misplaced.

Dick thumbed through it and as pornography went, found it one of the most unarousing things he had ever seen. He thought photos of sawmill accidents or toxic waste would have been sexier. The magazine consisted of some old black and white shots of Bettie Page throwing a beach ball, a photo of Jenna Jameson in a bikini, the Venus di Milo, plus some shots from an old Victoria's Secrets catalogue and a reproduction of the poster of Raquel Welch from 'One Million Years BC'.

Grace added, 'I'd heard that people find the idea of two women together quite sexually arousing so I manipulated the images'.

Dick could see that Grace had understood the principle of the idea but not the detail. For a start, Bettie and Jenna were facing opposite directions and it looked as though Bettie was just four feet tall. And as for the photo of Raquel Welch and the Venus di Milo, well maybe someone who'd been raised in, and hadn't left a monastery for their entire adult life, might have felt a slight stirring in their groin, but that was about all.

'Not bad', said Dick, trying not to let his horror show but failing dismally.

Grace detected this disappointment and blushed. Taylor stepped in to save her from any more embarrassment.

'It's a start', he explained. 'But like the films, it's all we can do with the tools at our disposal. We can really do with your expertise'.

'But why don't you just photograph naked people and make new magazines and films, rather than rely on these relics?', asked Dick reasonably, adding, 'Some of those images are about 200 years old, and they weren't that erotic at the time. You must have your own cameras'.

Edward answered, ‘The Party controls technology and everything they do has been designed to thwart us. We have cameras but photographs can only be printed at outlets overseen by the Party’.

‘But what about digital cameras?’, asked Dick.

Edward looked at him blankly.

Dick elaborated. ‘You know, where you can see the images you’ve taken immediately, and you can save them electronically or print them yourself’.

Edward looked at Dick even more blankly than before.

‘They might have been common-place in your era but the Party made sure they were all withdrawn from use and has not allowed the technology to re-surface’, explained Taylor adding, ‘Except for their own use’.

‘What about video cameras? I know you’ve got these’, continued Dick. ‘Alice showed me a short film of this time’.

‘Those images were taken on such a device stolen from a Party office‘, Taylor explained. ‘The Resistance member who made the recording did so at an immense personal risk. He had to replace the camera immediately afterwards’. With a serious expression Taylor continued, ‘If the Party discovered it was missing there would have been a huge security clampdown, mass interrogations and the eventual discovery of the “mole” within their organisation and their probable execution. The Party will go to extreme lengths to stop equipment like this falling into the wrong hands’.

‘*Our* hands’, Susan added, although Dick had already realised this.

Dick anticipated the answer to the next question before it left his lips, but asked it anyway. ‘But you have the Internet, don’t you?’

By now Edward’s expression was so blank that Dick instinctively wanted to grab a marker pen and draw two eyes, a nose and a mouth on it – and possibly a little pointy beard for good measure.

‘I don’t think so’, Taylor said. ‘What does it do?’

‘Well, you can send jokes, buy and sell shit you don’t need and search for information and pictures on any subject, especially sex’. Dick thought that was a pretty thorough explanation but added for good measure, ‘It’s a sort of network which links all the computers in the world’.

More blank looks.

Dick became slightly more worried. ‘You do have computers, don’t you?’, he enquired nervously.

Taylor saw the panic in Dick’s eyes. ‘Yes, we have computers’, he explained. ‘But from what I know, they are very rudimentary compared to those in your time. It’s another case I’m afraid of the Party controlling and restricting the technology’.

‘OK, you have computers, but no Internet?’

‘It sounds like we have something similar whereby people can access data from a large central memory bank’, Taylor advised.

‘That’s great!’ Dick exclaimed.

‘It’s good in principle’, Taylor agreed, but then looked sullen. ‘But not in practice. For a start, the Party heavily censors all the data. You can only access what they deem as being suitable. By controlling the information they control the balance of power’.

Dick was astounded. ‘That’s incredible. I knew you guys had it bad but to deny you online porn is denying you the most basic of human rights. It’s what the Internet was invented for!’ The more Dick learned about the future, the more it sounded less like a Brave New World and more like a Shit New World.

‘I can’t believe you live like this’, he exclaimed. ‘Progress has been replaced by, well, you know…’ Dick struggled for a few seconds to find the right words, ‘…the opposite of progress’.

‘And that is the very reason, Mr. Longg, that the resistance movement exists’. Taylor consulted his pocket watch. ‘Look, it’s nine o’clock so I suggest you take a well-earned rest after your journey here. Tomorrow we can tell you more about our world and your mission’.

‘My mission, yeah’, replied Dick. ‘Sure, and after I’ve kicked some Party butt I can leave you a better world and then go back to mine’.

Taylor looked confused, ‘What do you mean, “go back”?

‘You know.’, Dick said, ‘”Go back” as in “go back”’.

Taylor frowned. ‘You can’t go back. The Temporal Bracelets that you and Alice wore were also stolen from the Party. The original New Victorians brought them; it’s how they transported themselves to the future. There were only four functioning bracelets left and we managed to steal two. For reasons no one understands they can each only be used for one journey back in time and one forward. After that they cease to function.

Dick looked down at his wrist and noticed for the first time that the lights that had once pulsated had now dimmed. What had previously been a Temporal Bracelet was now just a bracelet, and a particularly unattractive one.

‘So you’re saying that I’m stuck here?’ Dick asked.

‘Yes’, said Taylor, matter-of-factly before adding, ‘Didn’t Alice warn you about that?’

‘No!’ Dick exclaimed.

‘Oh. Well it probably just slipped her mind’.

‘Slipped her mind? Slipped her fucking mind!’, Dick exclaimed. ‘Forgetting to buy milk when you’re out shopping… forgetting to set the video timer when you leave the house… They’re the things that “slip your mind”, not forgetting to tell someone that they’re going to

be trapped in the fucking future!' Dick was incensed. 'She brought me here under false pretences!'

'I'm sorry Mr. Longg. She did have rather a lot to think about'.

Dick was confused, angry, frustrated and bewildered all in rapid succession but then settled on just being angry. When he had calmed down enough to speak he said rather aggressively, 'Now I don't know if I want to help you. You've misled me. What happens if I want to leave here right now? Is anyone going to stop me? Well, are they?'

Taylor sympathised, 'Mr. Longg. We are all peaceful here. We save our anger for the Party and its policies. The last thing we want is to keep someone here against their will. You are quite free to go if you decide you don't like being here and don't want to help us'.

'You mean it?' asked Dick, surprised by this response. Taylor nodded. 'So I can just walk out of here?'

'Of course', Taylor replied. 'You obviously can't go back to your own time but I'm sure you'll manage to find a way to blend in with our society on your own. Naturally, without having an implanted biometric identity chip like every citizen has, it probably won't be long before you're picked-up by the security forces and thoroughly examined and interrogated'. Dick listened intently as Taylor continued. 'I'm sure that they'll find your over-size endowment something of a novelty and might even deem it "unconstitutional". In fact, I wager it won't be long before it's removed on the grounds of medical research'.

Dick didn't like the sound of that. Not one little bit. Living in a world without sex was one thing but living in a world without a sex organ was something else. He considered his options which didn't take long because he really only had one.

'OK I'll help', he said, with as much enthusiasm as he could muster.

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Dick was lead down yet another corridor and shown to his quarters, a sparsely decorated room housing a bed, a desk and a chair, with a toilet, shower and sink in one corner. He removed the bracelet and disdainfully threw it into a bin before taking a cold shower (Taylor had previously explained that the resistance headquarters could only offer some home comforts, and a satisfactory supply of hot water was obviously not one of them). Dick dried himself, put on the pyjama bottoms that had been left out for him and climbed wearily into the bed. Although he was anxious, worried and a bit scared by recent events he was surprised to find that sleep came easy. Very soon

he was dozing like a baby. Albeit a baby that had travelled over a hundred and forty years into the future.

Dick's deep sleep lasted only for two or three hours; any thoughts of a long and refreshing rest were rudely interrupted by a series of muffled noises that gradually increased in volume. At first these sounds remained rooted firmly in Dick's subconscious but as they became progressively louder they made that sneaky and unwelcome move into his consciousness, which is when Dick woke up. Initially he thought he'd been woken by the sound of a car backfiring but soon realised that this probably wasn't the case. He was pretty certain that hovercars didn't backfire and even if they did, then he was even more certain that there wasn't a hovercar lurking in the corridor right outside his room.

Then the realisation dawned that the 'popping' sound belonged to something far more dramatic and dangerous than a vehicle loose in the building. The sound Dick heard was actually the muffled sound of gunfire and this was swiftly followed by the not very muffled sound of his door being broken down. The wooden panels splintered easily under the onslaught of constant kicking. Soon, enough of the panels had been broken away to reveal the perpetrators, two top-hatted figures; the very same men that had tried to kill him on the film set. As the door continued to disintegrate in front of him Dick wiped the sleep from his eyes and swung himself out of bed. He instinctively knew he had to find something to defend himself with and his eyes quickly darted around the small room. Dick realised that his only chance of survival would be to improvise a weapon. Then he saw it; the soap dispenser right next to his wash basin. The perfect means of attack.

Two forceful, well-aimed kicks later and the door was no more. Stumbling over the shattered timber the two assailants stumbled into Dick's room, guns raised. If all had gone according to plan Dick would have sent a stream of stinging liquid soap into his attackers' eyes, temporarily blinding them while he ran passed them and raised the alarm.

Unfortunately, as often happens in situations like this, all did not go according to plan. All that actually happened was the dispenser emitting a squirty, farty sound followed by a tiny bit of soap bubbling at the nozzle, and very little else. This was the exact point that Dick expected to be dead but astonishingly the two attackers didn't seem to want to kill him, or if they did, then they were being very relaxed and casual about the whole thing. They stood facing him, their weapons still raised but seemingly rather amused by his pathetic escape attempt. Dick shouted out for assistance. To Taylor. To Alice. To

Edward, Susan or Grace. To anyone who could hear his pleas. The two men didn't try and stop Dick as he pushed past them. Edward was the first person he bumped into. Well, not so much bumped into, as fell over. Edward was lying prone on the floor. Dead. And if not dead, then the large hole in his forehead would certainly cause him severe problems in later life.

Dick ran into the lounge. His newfound friends were all there, and all equally incapacitated due to additional holes in their anatomy. Faced by this carnage Dick felt sickened and stunned. As he looked forlornly at the bodies, considering just how much danger he was in, for example was it 'extreme' or just 'severe', one of the two men lifted some sort of syringe to his arm. Dick immediately went limp. He knew this was never a good state to be in whatever the circumstances, and now was no different.

CHAPTER 6

Dick drifted in and out of consciousness for what seemed like several days. In moments of lucidity he recognised that he was in some sort of secure hospital, being interrogated and examined by doctors. He wasn't aware of being tortured however his captors seemed extremely interested and concerned about his penis and Dick lost count of the number of times he was poked, prodded, measured, photographed, scanned and X-rayed. He even recalled being fondled but not in a nice way. It was by a man standing behind a glass screen using one of those mechanical claw devices more commonly used to handle dangerous plutonium fuel rods.

The treatment continued for a tedious length of time until he woke up one day in a different environment. This time Dick found himself naked in almost complete darkness in what he assumed was a prison cell. There was a rudimentary toilet and an uncomfortable sleeping bench against one solid wall while unyielding steel bars formed the other three. Dick was aware of a man shouting in the distance, accompanied by a low murmur that was becoming louder by the minute. Suddenly a klaxon sounded and his cell was flooded with a glaring white light.

As his eyes slowly became accustomed to the brightness Dick was aware of two things. Firstly, that his cell was actually more of a cage; one of many in a large tented enclosure. And secondly, that he had an audience that was slowly increasing in size. Not the previous collection of security personnel, scientists or medics. This was a completely new mix of civilians; men, women — even small children. It took a few minutes before the realisation of Dick's situation began to sink in. He wasn't just a prisoner, he was an exhibit in a Victorian freak show — the Elephant Man of 2150. To his audience, he must have appeared just like Joseph Merrick, hideously deformed and a sight to be pitied. Only unlike the real Mr. Merrick, Dick definitely did possess something resembling a rather large trunk. Smelling salts were being administered to a number of women who had fainted. Children were crying. Even grown men were crying but Dick didn't know whether this was out of horror, pity or just jealousy.

Dick could hear the voice of the barker become louder as he moved through the astonished crowd. Soon he was in sight wearing a bright chequered showman's costume and carrying an ornate silver-topped cane that he used as a pointer. Eventually stopping outside Dick's cell he clanged the bars loudly with the cane.

'There he is ladies and gentlemen', he barked (because that's what barkers did), 'Before your very eyes, a freak of nature like no other! A

living example of the dangers of sexual intercourse out of wedlock! This man has indulged in the sexual act far too frequently and became contaminated… infected… resulting in his current, hideous, pestiferous condition. Look how malformed he is. A man in human form for the most part, but between his legs hangs a gruesome appendage… a macabre tentacle!'

The inquisitive crowd surged forward as the barker whipped them into a fervour. 'Have you laid your eyes on such a pitiful specimen? Not so much as man as a monstrous beast! There is no known cure for this sexual deviant. There is no relief from his suffering… apart from one!'

In expectation of the answer the crowd's murmuring died down. 'The only remedy', the barker continued, 'Is…', (here he gave a theatrical pause), 'Amputation!'

At this exact moment the barker pulled the top off his cane to reveal a swordstick. Catching the glare of the lights, the blade almost glowed and the crowd gasped. Dick gasped too, but for completely different reasons. He really, really, really hoped the barker had revealed the swordstick just for dramatic effect. He'd never hoped for anything in his life so much. To Dick's immense relief the barker replaced the blade and continued his shpiel.

'Step right up and take a look but and let me remind you: approach the cage at your own risk. Remember ladies, he could put anything through those bars!'

The barker put obvious stress on the word 'anything', at which point there was another collective gasp from the audience. Dick now realised why he'd been spared. Now that he was no longer involved with the Resistance, or whatever remained of them, he was relatively harmless. In this state he was obviously more use to the Party alive than dead. He was their greatest propaganda coup and as such would probably spend the rest of his pitiful days in this cage, entertaining the public. He imagined he was part of a large collection of 'freaks' used to promote the dangers of promiscuity. As he couldn't see them properly he could only take a wild guess at the identity of his fellow exhibits in the other cages. Maybe there was a man with four testicles. Maybe he had more. Or none. A woman with two vaginas. Or a penis. Or three breasts.

Dick wasn't sure whether it was the sense of danger, the fact he was naked and being watched or the thought of a woman with three breasts, but he felt an erection in progress. He wasn't the only one to notice and it was obvious that the barker, let alone the spectators, had no idea how big it was going to get. As they backed off, Dick, feeling braver by the moment, moved to the edge of his cage until he was holding the bars, his face wedged up against them, waggling his stiff

member and bellowing defiantly like a latter day Tarzan. He heard shouting. Lots of it. Faced with this spectacularly terrifying sight, many of the women and a number of men in the crowd passed out. Most of those who remained had run away crying in blind panic. A few of the more brave or inquisitive souls had decided to stay and stare. The barker, fearing for his life, had instinctively separated his cane again.

The blade came slicing through the air towards Dick's groin, much too fast for him to react.

He screamed a primeval scream.

This was still bellowing from his lungs when Alice burst through the door.

'What's wrong?', she asked. She looked extremely concerned.

Dick sat up in his bed and saw he was in his room once more. His sheets were in disarray and he was drenched in sweat from this truly terrifying nightmare.

'Alice. You can't imagine how pleased I am to see you'.

'I'd noticed', she replied, looking down at his lap.

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Dick slept far more soundly the second time and awoke fresh to face whatever challenges the next day brought, just as long as they didn't involve being abducted by any members of the Party. Or having a sharp sword heading directly towards his penis. He was towelling himself dry after another cold shower when Taylor knocked on his door, requesting his presence in the lounge.

'Dick, there's someone I'd like you to meet'.

'Is it someone who's discovered a way to return me to 2010?', Dick spoke back to the door with misplaced optimism.

'No', came Taylor's disembodied voice, adding Dick thought, to try and make him feel better, 'But I've made you coffee and a hearty breakfast'.

Taylor had left the equivalent of a New Victorian sweat suit out for Dick to wear, a grey-coloured brushed-cotton ensemble, more functional than fashionable. In fact, not fashionable at all, unless you lived in a retirement condo in Fort Lauderdale, Dick thought. He finished dressing and headed for the lounge, contemplating that eggs, tomatoes, hash browns and bacon, even if it was the really crispy type he liked, were definitely no substitute for reverse time travel. He pushed opened the panelled door and found himself looking at a plump woman in her late forties. Her pale face was framed with a mass of unruly frizzy ginger hair, the style sported by the lead

character in The Hair Bear Bunch.

'Good morning Dick', said a smiling Taylor who was standing beside her. 'I'd like you to meet the Oracle'.

Dick shook her pallid, chubby hand with an expression that was part polite smile and part disappointed sneer. So *this* was the Oracle. When Taylor had first mentioned her, Dick had visions of a mysterious, wizened crone whose decades of wisdom were etched in deep lines that criss-crossed her expressive face — not an unattractive middle-aged woman with an orange 'fro. Dick considered himself extremely liberal in his views but there were some popular prejudices he shared and could not shake off; an unconditional dislike and distrust of Turks, the Welsh and the ginger. He hated everything about the latter; their hair colour (obviously), the way they insisted on describing themselves in a quasi-exotic way such as 'flame-haired', 'strawberry blonde' or 'Titian' and their skin — the colour of watered-down milk; so pale you can almost see their internal organs. But there was one thing he hated above all else, and this was the reason he refused to work with ginger-haired girls: orange pubes. And here he was, now standing facing the woman who was ultimately responsible for him being kidnapped and now trapped in this horrendous future.

The Oracle spoke. 'Hello Mr. Longg. I saw you in a dream'.

She didn't expect Dick to punch her in the face. Neither did Dick. It was just a reflex act; a combination of the Welsh lilt in her voice and the fact that Dick needed to take his anger and frustration out on someone. Taylor helped the Oracle up from the floor and into an armchair, producing a handkerchief to stem the blood from her nose.

'I can understand your resentment, Mr. Longg', said the Oracle, holding her head back and pinching her nose.

'You saw me in a dream? In a fucking dream!' Dick was incredulous. He couldn't spell that particular word or pronounce it properly, but he was in that state all the same. 'And you had me brought over six hundred years into the future on the basis of just a dream?'

Dick was never good with maths. He was actually only a hundred and forty years in the future but Taylor decided that it really wasn't the best time to correct him.

'It was an omen', said the Oracle. 'A crystal clear image of you formed in my mind!'

'What was responsible for this image?', Dick asked, expecting to hear something about hallucinogenic drugs or a self-induced spiritual altered state.

'Cheese', said the Oracle.

Dick really hoped he hadn't heard the Oracle say the word 'cheese'. He actually wished she'd said something like 'fleas' or even

‘bees’, as if insects were somehow involved in forming her visions; even those would have been preferable to a milk-based foodstuff. Sadly for Dick, his hearing was fine.

‘Cheese on toast, in fact’, the Oracle continued in her annoying Welsh accent destroying, Dick thought, any impression of mysticism or the paranormal that Oracles traditionally convey. ‘It was Stilton. Or it might have been mature cheddar… Or was it a nice piece of Brie? Anyway, I had a late night snack and dreamt about someone who would be our salvation. That person was YOU!’

‘Jesus!’ exclaimed Dick. Turning to Taylor he asked, ‘Doesn’t this sound a little, shall we say, flaky?’.

‘Flaky? I don’t understand’, said Taylor, frowning.

‘Flaky. You know, a bit weird. Putting your faith in someone like me, someone you’ve never met before, on the basis of what this fucking crackpot saw in a cheese-inspired dream’. By now Dick was wide-eyed in astonishment. ‘How good is she? I mean, has she ever had this sort of vision before?’

Taylor hesitated, carefully looking for the right words, but it was the Oracle who answered, dramatically waving one of her hands around while dabbing the other one at the blood still dripping from her nose. ‘I had a similar dream about four years ago. It was very clear. Very clear indeed. I saw a man. He came from an earlier time.’

‘The Resistance brought him here in a similar way to you’, explained Taylor.

‘So I guess the reason I’m here now is because he didn’t defeat the Party’, said Dick.

Taylor nodded.

‘Then what happened? Why didn’t he succeed?’, Dick enquired, asking for good measure, ‘And where is he now?’.

Taylor sighed and shook his head. ‘I wasn’t in the Resistance then, but from what I know, they trained him well and sent him out into the real world to begin his mission’. He paused and looked away. ‘Sadly, after a few months it was apparent that he didn’t succeed’.

‘What happened? Was his identity compromised? Did a piece of equipment fail?’ Dick was becoming irritated. He wanted answers. ‘Did he have to abandon the operation? Was he captured?’

Taylor’s reply came in a whisper. ‘We’re not sure’.

Dick’s reply also came in a whisper, though he wasn’t sure why, as he was quite annoyed over this lack of answers. ‘I know you weren’t there but you must know what happened!’.

Taylor looked at his feet. ‘I don’t’. He studied his shoes more intently and spoke even more quietly. ‘The Resistance never saw him or heard from him ever again’.

Dick’s astonishment was evident in his voice which raised a

whole octave. ‘So you’re putting all your trust in this complete fruit loop who’s made a similar prediction in the past, and who got it absolutely, completely wrong? Nought out of one. Or to put it another way, a 100% failure rate. It’s hardly a good track record, is it?’, Dick asked, exasperated.

‘No, but this time I’m *really* confident’ said the Oracle looking Dick straight in the eyes, although Dick felt her answer lacked the degree of conviction he would have liked.

CHAPTER 7

The Oracle had left the lounge to try and stop her nosebleed which had shown no sign of abating. As Dick picked at his breakfast, which was quite good even though the bacon wasn't anywhere as crispy as he liked, Taylor explained that the other resistance members were at their various places of work; their colleagues and employers blissfully ignorant of their extraordinary double lives. By day, trusted and loyal supporters of The Party. By night and in their spare time, revolutionaries, plotters, and advocates of, and participants in, free sex.

'So?' Dick asked, indicating the china cup in front of him, 'Is your sex life as steamy as this coffee? I mean I know married citizens are only meant to make love once a week but all of you here must do it more frequently?'

'We do', Taylor replied. There are a few bedrooms here like the one you have and members are free to use them with colleagues whenever they want. It's not without problems though'.

'What do you mean?' asked Dick. 'Apart from possible lubrication issues how can having frequent sex cause problems?'.

'You have to remember our two purposes', Taylor explained, 'Yes, we want to learn how to enjoy sex so we can teach other like-minded citizens that they are sexually-repressed — to open their eyes to what life could, and should, be like.

'But our main aim is to bring about the downfall of the Party. Only by achieving this will everyone truly be free. At the moment though', Taylor continued, 'We're doing too much of the former and not enough of the latter'.

'And the problem is…', Dick enquired.

'The problem is', said Taylor, 'that the sex is getting in the way of the plotting and the planning. We hold formal meetings and training sessions but everyone has become so sexually frustrated that these gatherings tend to degenerate into group sex sessions. This has even spilled over into actual field missions. Many of these have become compromised or even failed because a team has ended up having intercourse when they should have been carrying out covert operations'.

'So they've been infiltrating each other rather than infiltrating the Party', Dick quipped, quite pleased with this comment.

'You could say that', said Taylor dryly. 'We once had two members smuggled into the Party's communications centre, concealed in a bank of dummy electrical equipment. They were there to observe and gather information, then escape; we had an audio-link so we

could eavesdrop on conversations. Unfortunately the close confinement became too much and overcome with passion they tried to have sex, causing the equipment to start shuffling around before it eventually fell over.'

'Did they get out?', asked Dick.

'Alas, no', said Taylor sadly. 'The shuffling equipment and the panting sounds from within it alerted security. Our operatives were captured and never seen again'.

'Do you think they were interrogated or tortured?' enquired Dick.

'Without a doubt'.

'But then wouldn't they have revealed everything about you, the Resistance and this headquarters?', asked Dick.

'No. The location of this building is an extremely closely guarded secret. Virtually everyone who comes and goes is blindfolded. Only members of the Resistance High Command know its location. That's me, Alice, Susan and Edward.

'But what happens if any of *you* are captured?' asked Dick.

'That would obviously cause problems, which is the main reason why the High Command never go on field missions. We train, we encourage and we lead'.

'OK', asked Dick, by now getting quite animated. 'If anyone else in the Resistance was caught and tortured, wouldn't they reveal their colleagues' identities?'

'They couldn't. Everyone uses false names and we keep our addresses, our places of work, in fact all aspects of our private lives completely confidential. If anyone was captured, all they could do is describe the general appearance of other resistance members but the Party knows it would take forever interrogating every 'tall man with brown eyes and dark hair' or every 'thirty-five year old woman with blue eyes and short blonde hair'.

Taylor continued, 'Most of us have partners who are not in the Resistance and who don't know anything about our secret lives. When we come here we tell them we're working late, visiting friends, out with colleagues — anything that makes a believable cover story'.

'So you have to avoid arousing suspicion in order to get aroused?'. Dick was even more pleased with this latest quip but Taylor ignored him and there was an uncomfortable silence for a moment or two, broken by Dick asking, 'How do you identify potential Resistance members?'

'We all keep our eyes open for signs, however small, of anti-Party sentiment. It could be a throwaway remark, a small symbolic act of rebellion or even a minor public order offence. We then observe the citizen for at least six months to make sure they are who they appear to be, that they are genuine and not Party members masquerading as

people sympathetic to our cause in order to infiltrate the Resistance. We could recruit a lot more members but we can't afford to be lax in our vetting procedures'.

'OK, but then how do you make an approach?' enquired Dick.

'Very carefully at first. Usually by dropping a subtle comment here and there to establish how we feel about the Party. Of course, you have to understand that for all they know, the potential recruits we approach might consider *us* Party members, secretly testing their loyalty. That means there has to be a high degree of trust from both sides'. Taylor continued, 'Anyone who comes here is not only taken and brought back blindfolded, they keep the blindfold on throughout all our discussions with them. It only comes off when we're satisfied they are genuine. The outer entrance door incorporates sensors to detect concealed bugging devices, homing beacons, recording equipment or indeed weapons. That way we make doubly sure we're not inviting back any disguised Party operatives'.

'But surely people can work out where they are once the blindfold comes off?', enquired Dick.

'Why should they?', replied Taylor. 'Look around you. This facility could be anywhere. In an office building, the basement of a museum, a private house, an underground storage depot, a factory outbuilding, a disused hospital — even in one of the Party's own facilities, operating under their very noses!'

'So where are we then?' asked Dick, looking around his surroundings with renewed interest.

'Even though you have been brought here to act as our main weapon against the Party I still cannot divulge that information. You remember that other man who was trained by my predecessor in much the same way as we will train you…'

'Ah yes. That would be the person the Oracle saw in a previous very accurate dream', Dick said with more than a hint of sarcasm in his voice.

'Yes. That was him', Taylor said uncomfortably. 'Although we don't know exactly what happened, supposing he was captured…'

'Which he most definitely was', added Dick.

'Just supposing…' continued Taylor, ignoring Dick's barbed comment, 'that happened and he knew our exact location, he would have lead the Party right back here. That's why we have to take these precautions. It's not that we don't trust you, it's that just we can't take the risk'.

'That's OK. I understand', said Dick.

'Good', said Taylor rising from the table. 'You need to learn a lot more about our time. Alice's brief film showed you something about our world but there is much more to find out. Only by understanding

our enemy can you learn how to defeat it. Before we start a formal induction course we thought it would be good for you to discover as much about our society as you can on your own'.

Dick followed him out of the room to another that contained a number of computer terminals. He sat himself in front of one.

'Er, how is Alice?', he asked.

'She's fine thank you. She was a bit disturbed after seeing you in distress after your nightmare last night but apart from that she is fine. She's at work at the moment'. Taylor pulled another chair up to the terminal.

'How long has she been in the Resistance?'

'About three years. She's one of our greatest assets. She's dedicated and almost fearless. She's a very special girl Mr. Longg. Very special indeed'.

Dick nodded in agreement but then couldn't help himself adding, 'With a great rack'.

Taylor looked confused. 'Rack?' he asked.

'You know', Dick explained, 'Boobs… Bazookas… Funbags… Hooters… Tits… Jugs…'

Seeing Taylor's confused expression Dick resorted to using his hands and gave the universal gesture for a 'great rack', which, he was pleased to see, was still readily understood in 2150.

Taylor nodded his comprehension. 'Ah yes. She is unusual in that respect. The mandatory monthly injections don't just reduce the population's sex drive, they also contain hormones that will reduce the size of a woman's bust although it doesn't work on every single woman. The Party know that breasts can be stimulating and even provocative so they promote a flat-chested look as desirable and fashionable. In this society, Mr. Longg, women with large breasts are considered unattractive. Those cursed with this physical condition try and disguise it by wearing loose, unflattering clothing or restrictive foundation garments'.

Dick shuddered. This world was becoming more and more crazy and more and more scary.

'Come on. Let's get you started', said Taylor, reaching over and activating the terminal. He explained how it worked and within a few moments Dick was familiar with its operation. He was connected to the 2150 version of the Internet — an Internet without pornography, he remembered despondently. From here he could access information, news stories, magazine articles, images — in fact everything he needed to give him a thorough understanding of his new world, or more accurately, the things that the Party deemed suitable for him to see. With Taylor's last comments still ringing in his ears Dick decided that he would first try and find out if what he had been saying about

bust size was true (well, that seemed as good a place as any to start his research).

He typed in the word ‘breasts’ and was taken to a list of 364,793 sites about chicken recipes. He typed in ‘tits’ and found 642,652 sites on bird watching. And when he entered ‘bosom’ he received the message, ‘No matches found. Are you sure you don't mean the words “Party Ideology?”’. Thinking laterally he soon located the Victoria’s Secrets Internet site. He was pleased and amazed to discover the company was still in business but dismayed to learn that the bosomless look was most definitely in. Their best-selling lingerie line was a range of uncomfortable-looking corsets designed to reduce the appearance of the bust. Furthermore, bras larger than a 34A had to be specially ordered and as a disincentive to having a large bust, these were brutally over-priced and had a delivery time of six to nine months. Further research showed him that glamour magazines, or what passed for them in this society, featured cover girls and models so flat-chested that it would be quite understandable if you mistakenly addressed them as ‘sir’.

Dick also learned that most of the wealthy and the vain indulged themselves with breast reduction operations, while the very wealthy and the very vain opted for what he could only describe as complete bosom liposuction. It didn’t take long for Dick to follow the links from cosmetic surgery to medical procedures to medical conditions and several clicks later Dick came across a whole series of sites about masturbation, an act the Party viewed as an acute and dangerous medical condition. He knew the practice was frowned upon but didn’t realise that there was such a lucrative industry in this era manufacturing and marketing anti-masturbatory devices. These were examples of Victorian engineering and ingenuity at its very best. Dick discovered that these devices were compulsory for all men between the ages of thirteen and nineteen; being fitted for your first anti-masturbatory device was viewed, ironically, as your coming of age. After that you could wear them voluntarily (and many did) while chronic masturbators would have them prescribed irrespective of whether they were single or married.

Dick also became aware that there was a huge choice of appliances on the market designed to discourage self-love. Although he didn't have intimate knowledge of torture implements or practices he was sure that the Spanish Inquisition or the SS would have fallen over themselves to get their hand on such equipment (this pre-supposed, of course, that the Spanish Inquisition or the SS would ever have suffered the indignity of falling over in the first place). Most of the devices involved penile rings or tubes lined with miniature spikes or blades that came into contact with the penis whenever it became

aroused. To Dick, these simple devices seemed a pretty foolproof way of making sure you didn't get excited, voluntarily or otherwise, so he was surprised to see there was a need, let alone a market, for even more sophisticated and painful versions. But he guessed that even when it came down to anti-masturbation devices, some people just had to have the very best.

Some of these more extreme versions included batteries and capacitors to give the wearer an electric shock if he started 'pleasuring himself' — as the description explained. The most sophisticated device he saw looked like the Lexus of anti-masturbatory aids. Not only did this particular model involve electricity and tiny blades, but it also included some sort of small wire noose that went round the testicles, and a very mild acid spray. The way these devices alerted others was also as ingenious. Most just set off an alarm but the more sophisticated also gave a visual clue that masturbation might be in progress including bright flashing lights that were visible under even the heaviest clothing — or versions that emitted coloured smoke or which drenched the wearer in an indelible purple dye.

Masturbation crossed all social divides, and in Dick's experience the wealthiest people he had known were among the most chronic masturbators (or at least, that's the impression they gave), so he was pleased to see that these people could indulge themselves by buying devices which were gold or silver plated and embellished with precious stones. Designer brands were rife with contraptions branded by Gucci, Armani and Dolce & Gabbana while more sporty users were provided for by the likes of Adidas, Puma or Reebok. Nike versions, he noted, were marketed with the slogan. 'Don't Do It'.

After a while Taylor, carrying a well-worn leather briefcase, came back to see how Dick was progressing. Dick rubbed his eyes and slumped back in his chair, glad of the distraction.

'Wow. I didn't realise how weird your world is. And depressing. And people are happy to live this way?'

'They have no choice. They don't know any better', Taylor shrugged.

'But what about your parents or grandparents. They must have told people what life used to be like', Dick enquired.

'Sadly, no', Taylor added. 'The Party has been in power for over a hundred years so none of us have surviving relatives to tell us about what they would have surely called 'the good old days' — the days 'pre-Party'. The Party have made sure that the history books have been re-written; any trace of a more liberal existence has been almost completely erased'.

'But what about old books?', asked Dick. 'There must still be some around that give people an idea of life in my time'.

‘Occasionally we do find old literature but we’re not sure whether to believe it or not’, Taylor explained. ‘Some of it might actually be fake, planted by the Party to further confuse us. They are so devious we’re really not sure what to believe’.

‘Well, what about people in other countries? The people there must be enjoying the future of 2150 and not some weird throwback era. The British people must know what life is like outside their borders. What it’s like in the real world’, Dick stated, demonstrating rare logic that surprised even him.

‘To all intents and purposes’, Taylor explained. ‘These countries don’t exist’.

It was time for Dick to frown again.

‘The Party have, in effect, cut themselves off from the outside world. There is obviously some contact to enable the import and export of food or goods, but this is very tightly controlled and monitored. Unlike the original Victorians who wanted to expand their empire and protect their colonies, the Party practice a much more severe and extreme form of “Splendid Isolation”. That way they have control over the population’.

‘So most people don’t have any idea of what sex can be like or what they’re missing?’, Dick enquired.

‘Not really. Any stories that have been passed down are dismissed as old wives’ tales or fanciful myths. And it doesn’t matter if anyone believes them anyway; the Party will detect and make sure they stamp out any “unnatural” acts or behaviour before they can spread’.

‘Yeah, but according to the Party, having sex more than once a week is an “unnatural act'!” exclaimed Dick. ‘l could tell the Party a thing or two about unnatural acts that would make their hair curl! Sex with pets. Inserting fruit in your ass. Inserting fruit in your pet’s ass. Inserting pets in your ass — with or without fruit’.

‘Ass?’, asked Taylor.

‘You know, your rectum…’, explained Dick who suddenly smelled that distinctive rose-scented perfume again.

‘But why would you want to insert a pet in your rectum?’ asked a soft, feminine voice.

Dick turned around to see that Alice had entered the room.

‘Good question’, Dick responded, slightly embarrassed. ‘The thing is, I personally don’t know, but people got turned on by many different things’.

‘Turned-on?’, Alice enquired blankly.

‘Yeah. You know. Get off to’.

More blank looks. ‘Stuff that gives you the horn’, continued Dick.

Alice looked even more confused, ‘The horn?’

‘Stuff that makes you aroused… sexually excited’.

Alice nodded her comprehension and Dick continued. ‘In my time there was a market for photographing and filming every variation of the sex act. People wanted to see heterosexual sex, same-sex sex, group sex, sex with dwarves, sex with fat people, sex with old ladies, sex with transsexuals, sex with transvestites, sex with old fat dwarf transsexuals.

‘There was a demand for seeing people dressed up having sex’, continued Dick. ‘I'm not just talking about revealing outfits or sexy uniforms, I'm talking about dressing-up as bee-keepers, fishermen, coal miners, even deep sea divers complete with the big brass helmets and lead boots. Hell, I know of two films, ‘Three Ring Circus’ and ‘Banging Bozo’ where the male star was a sex-crazed clown. I guess some people out there found size 24 shoes, green hair and a bright red nose erotic’.

‘And it was a fact, was it not,’ interrupted Taylor, ‘That many people liked watching others being harmed when they had sex — or they derived pleasure from harming others?’

‘True’, confirmed Dick. ‘There was a huge market for movies featuring people being spanked, whipped, beaten or punched. And don’t even get me started on golden showers’.

‘Golden what?’, asked Alice.

Dick opened his mouth to explain but as the words were on the way from his brain to his mouth another part of his brain went into action to comprehend how ridiculous his explanation would sound and fortunately the two actions cancelled each other out. While a completely different part of Dick’s brain considered what to do next, Taylor interjected to save Dick’s embarrassment.

‘Well, that’s enough small talk for now. We’ve got a busy schedule’.

‘So’, Dick asked, now relieved he wouldn’t need to tell Alice about urination as a source of sexual pleasure. ‘I assume the Resistance High Command has a plan.’

‘We do’, said Taylor optimistically.

‘ls it a good one?’

‘lt’s the best one we've thought of’, Taylor added, with slightly less optimism than before. ‘And we think it's the only one that can succeed. It involves infiltrating the Party, gaining their trust, finding out about this rumoured secret weapon and then destroying it’.

‘And I'm going to be the one infiltrating the party’, said Dick, still secretly hoping that Taylor might say something like, ‘Actually no. We've thought about it some more and decided that you're not really suitable. Oh, and by the way we've just discovered a way to send you safely back to your own time’.

But he didn't.

What he did say, showing Dick the small electronic chip implanted just below the skin in his palm was, ‘You're the best choice. All of us have been tagged by the ID chips I mentioned. These record our name, address, occupation, family records — anything and everything about us’. He continued. ‘We can give you a fake identity to avoid detection. One of our members works in the Ministry of Population Control and through him we've arranged to get you a pre-programmed biometric chip that will give you a complete new identity’.

‘Great’, replied Dick. ‘But how can I suddenly ‘pop-up’ in your society from nowhere? Won’t it seem odd when a brand new member of the population appears out of the blue?’

‘Not at all’, said Taylor, this time with renewed confidence. ‘We’ll also be able to create all the records relating to your existence. Your education, employment, taxation, medical history. As far as the Party is concerned it will be like you’ve always existed here. There will be absolutely no reason to think otherwise’.

‘And all the falsified records will withstand the most detailed scrutiny’, added Alice. ‘We are absolutely certain of that’.

‘Well it still sounds like a high risk strategy’, said Dick.

‘I’d be lying to you if I told you it wasn’t’, said Taylor adding, ‘But desperate times require desperate measures’.

Dick voiced his doubts. ‘But surely you must have given this same sort of fake identity to the other guy you mentioned. The one that was probably exposed by the Party and killed?’

Ignoring this remark Taylor just repeated what he’d said earlier, ‘You’re the best choice’ and from the briefcase, handed Dick a bulky folder crammed with every single detail of his invented life. Dick flicked through it anxiously. As an actor in his particular field, Dick didn’t usually have many lines to remember but now he found himself having to memorise a whole back story. He left the room and returned to his temporary quarters to study his file and learn more about the oppressed world of 2150. As the door closed Alice spoke to Taylor.

‘Will he succeed?’, she asked gravely.

‘He has to’, Taylor replied, even more gravely. ‘For all his faults he’s the best chance we have. And given the time scales, he’s the only chance we have’.

‘But he knows about the previous attempt’, Alice commented.

Taylor nodded. ‘Whatever happened, happened’. He put both his hands on Alice’s shoulders and looked intently at her. ‘But we need to play that down since we don’t want to dishearten him. This time the Oracle says she is completely certain’.

Taylor moved his hands down from Alice’s shoulders to her chest and began opening her blouse. A few minutes later he was enjoying

energetic sex with her on the table, not the sort of behaviour you'd expect from a serious-looking leader of the Resistance given the fact that he had just started co-ordinating their biggest, most important and critical mission. But he was only human, after all.

CHAPTER 8

Now, if 'Uprising!' was a movie (and I'm looking to sell the rights if any agent, producer, director or studio exec is reading this), at this point you'd see a montage showing Dick studying his comprehensive fake history and undergoing his induction. You'd see him in a classroom environment being tutored by Taylor and Alice, frowning at handwritten notes that covered an entire blackboard, You'd see him cramming late into the night, the strain of the mission and the pressure to succeed showing on his face. You'd see his frustration at having to learn such a huge amount of information in such a short period of time, coupled with his fears of being trapped in the future — all to an upbeat rock soundtrack. The whole sequence would be like Rocky's training regime albeit not as dramatic. After all, studying and writing on six by four index cards is nowhere as exciting nor strenuous as running energetically up the steps of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

So, you'll have to take it from me that Dick studied and trained as well as he could, given his extremely low boredom threshold and his butterfly mind. Still, what he lacked in concentration he made up with determination and a photographic memory. Seated opposite Taylor and Alice in a small, stark room, Dick was being bombarded with quick-fire question after question after question. This had been going on for several days. Taylor would become angry and bang the table when Dick was slow at responding or got an answer wrong. Alice however, although just as serious, was more forgiving. Dick felt he was being cross-examined rather than tested, and looked at his inquisitors not so much as good cop and bad cop, as bad cop and good lay. He wasn't sure what it was about Alice that aroused him. It could have been her distinctive perfume, her full breasts or her pert buttocks. Or the fact that he hadn't had sex with anyone for two days (well, 142 years and two days) and at this point he'd have screwed anything with a shadow.

'Well?', Taylor asked with a tone of annoyance.

'Sorry?' asked Dick, tearing his gaze away from Alice's chest.

'Where do you live?'

'Pinner. North west London. Abode 16876, Elm Grove Tower'.

'And what were your parents' names?' Taylor continued.

'Thomas and Victoria'.

'Where do they live?'

'They don't', Dick explained. 'They died in a tragic hovercar crash eleven years ago'.

The questioning went on and on and on. Then it went on and on a

bit more. Like it did every single day. At the end of what Dick thought must have been the twenty fifth session Taylor at last gave a sigh of relief and smiled at Alice, then at Dick.

'Full marks again Dick. I think we can say you're now ready to begin your new life'.

With that he reached into the table drawer and pulled out an intricate brass mechanical device that resembled the sort of thing Dick imagined would insert a biometric chip under your skin. That or do something unimaginatively painful to your genitals. Fortunately Dick discovered it was the former. He offered his palm to Taylor and moments later was the recipient of both a small implant and a sore hand.

'Right', said Taylor triumphantly. 'Say goodbye to Dick Longg, pornographic film star and say hello to Jeremy Brunel, a potential new Assistant Communications Under Manager at the Ministry of Information'.

Alice saw lines forming on Dick's forehead so she jumped in before the frown was fully formed. 'It's the media monitoring and propaganda-generating machine of the Party', she explained. 'Its eyes, ears and mouth'. She told Dick that the Ministry of Information was responsible for devising publicity campaigns to inform and persuade; its main purpose was to influence the public.

'Control them, you mean', added Taylor. 'We thought your previous marketing and publicity experience in the film industry would make you ideal for the job'.

Dick thought about it and had to agree. Two of his early jobs in the studio publicity department had been persuading people to see the absolute stinkers 'King Ralph' and 'Hudson Hawk'. If he could manage this he was sure he could convince the public that pre-marital sex was evil. One thing Dick wasn't sure about however, was his new name. He didn't see himself as a Jeremy. He placed the name in the same category as Tarquin, Gerald or Adolf but Taylor told him it was too late to change it. The falsified records had been completed and fully integrated into all Party databases. The resistance member who arranged Dick's new identity had engineered not just Dick's entire back story, but also the job vacancy. It had been arranged that Dick's resume and experience made him the most suitable candidate by a long way. In theory he was a shoo-in for the job. All he had to do was remember every single thing he'd been taught and not crack under the pressure of the forthcoming job interview. Taylor had told him that this would be far, far more strenuous and severe than any of the mock interviews he'd undergone so far.

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This interview had been arranged for a Friday morning. Dick was taken there by Susan who, so they wouldn't be observed together, dropped him off six blocks from his final destination. Only then was he permitted to remove his sunglasses and the blindfold they concealed. He breathed in deeply, gulping the clean air in lungfuls. This was the first time he'd been out of the resistance headquarters since his arrival and Dick savoured this refreshing antidote to the L.A. smog he was so familiar with. The streets were filled with hurrying commuters like him, too busy and pre-occupied to notice anything about Dick's appearance that might make him stand out. Of course, there shouldn't have been anything that gave this impression as Dick had been groomed and styled in the fashion of the time, which meant a severe suit and even more severe haircut. In fact he cut quite a dash as he followed the crowds to his potential employer.

Although he'd been given a street map it wasn't difficult to find the Ministry of Information. Even a few blocks away it towered over the surrounding buildings, seemingly sucking workers towards its entrance like some monstrous vacuum cleaner. Turning the last corner Dick faced this thirty-storey monolith of a building. Craning his head, he surveyed its grey, faceless exterior. There was nothing about it that said this was a vitally important cog in the Party machine. If you didn't realise its purpose, Dick thought, the innocuous building could have easily been the Ministry of Ball Bearings or The Ministry of Blotting Paper. But then Dick remembered that its stark, anonymous features were indicative of Party policy. The building's appearance said 'hard work', 'respect for authority' and 'mindless dedication and commitment'. It also said, 'Abandon any hope of slacking, all ye who enter here'. Gulping again, a combination of nervousness and a desire to appreciate the air once more, Dick entered the double-height entrance lobby and crossed the foreboding cold marbled foyer like, he felt, a dead man walking.

Dick presented himself and explained the purpose of his visit to a very stern and very flat-chested receptionist. After checking and crosschecking a long list of names and appointments then making a verifying phone call to someone deep within the building, she directed him to the security desk. Here Dick held his palm over a scanner that flashed green. One of the security guards gave him the look that all security guards give; the look that says 'I'm bored with this unbelievably dull job and am only doing it because I'm not clever enough for the police'. After being issued with his visitor's badge Dick was directed to one of the gated elevators situated beyond reception. He pushed one of the ornately engraved ivory buttons and as the doors closed he was sure he heard a disembodied mechanical-sounding voice say, 'We know who you are'. Or was it 'We will kill

you'? He hoped it had actually said 'twenty fifth floor' but the elevator had reached its destination before his paranoia became too acute.

Exiting on to a deserted corridor he followed the signs to section G. Here he was met by an even more flat-chested woman and directed to sub section G.3. Arriving here Dick was met by a woman so flat-chested that she might as well have been a man or an ironing board in a wig. She/he/it showed him to Interview Room 54.2 that was empty except for two chairs either side of a desk. Dick straddled one of the chairs, his arms resting on the back. He leant forward and curled his lip, then decided that this pose was a bit too confrontational, or just plain stupid, for an interview. He was just changing positions when in walked a large, formidable woman in her late-forties carrying a large, formidable file. Without shaking Dick's hand or displaying any other form of greeting or courtesy, the stony-faced woman placed her file on the table and sat down opposite him. She introduced herself as Miss Vera Darling, the department head and therefore Dick's potential boss.

Her assessment was less of an interview and more of an interrogation. Flicking through the file she bombarded him with question after question after question, not just about his background and previous jobs but also on his views on party ideology and sex. In fact, he found himself answering more questions on sex than he ever had in his entire life, and that included the time he found himself testifying before a Senate Sub Committee on Sodomy. Vera also probed him about his upbringing and his family, prying deep, Dick assumed, to find out if there were any subversive skeletons hiding in his cupboard.

The training Taylor and Alice had provided served Dick well and he was able to give responses that were fast, confident and, more importantly, answers he was sure Vera wanted to hear. Despite this, Dick still felt uncomfortable. As Vera was making notes Dick had time to think about the look she'd been giving him. He was quite good at reading people but there was something about Vera that made him anxious. Her body language told him two things. That she knew he was faking it and she would take great pleasure in revealing his true identity as soon as this charade of an interview was over. Or that she was attracted to him. Either scenario filled Dick with dread. Eventually Vera put her pen down and spoke; Dick was extremely relieved to find that his anxiety had been misplaced.

'Well, Mr. Brunel', said an unemotional Vera Darling, closing the formidable file, 'You certainly seems to possess the right experience, aptitude and attitude for this vacancy'.

Dick nodded and smiled. In fact he smiled for two reasons. One because he was relieved that he had survived the interview. And two, because he had just realised what Vera's initials were.

She continued. ‘It’s almost as though the position here was designed exactly for you’.

Dick smiled again, this time slightly more nervously.

‘There are three more candidates to be interviewed and I will be making a decision within forty-eight hours. If you are successful, Mr. Brunel, then you would start on Monday. I presume that is practical?’. Dick told her that it was.

Vera continued, ‘One thing you should know, is that I am a very demanding boss. In fact, in the department I have a reputation for being a perfectionist and at times, a hard taskmaster. I insist on total devotion to your job and in going beyond the call of duty for the Party. I hope you are prepared for this uncompromising way of working’.

Dick wasn’t, but thought he’d better agree, ‘Of course. I am dedicated to the Party and relish the opportunity of working under you’. Dick wondered if Vera understood this admittedly weak double entendre but her reaction indicated she didn’t.

‘Good. Then that is all for now. Good day Mr. Brunel’.

Dick extended his hand in greeting but realised too late that Vera was not going to reciprocate. By then, he’d gone past the point of no-return and all he could do was change his move from a would-be handshake to a one-armed stretch and a yawn which, to be honest, looked ridiculous. Dick thought he’d just better leave but as he stood up and walked towards the door Vera called out.

‘Mr. Brunel?’

Dick turned and looked at Vera uneasily.

‘Yes, Miss Darling’

‘How is your sister?’

Dick was confused and somewhat alarmed by this seemingly random question. He paused before answering.

‘I don’t have one’, he replied nervously.

But Vera had her formidable file open again. ‘But your records indicate you do. Louise. Five years older’.

Dick hoped his expression concealed his inner panic. ‘I think you’re mistaken’, he said, trying to regain his composure but feeling the onset of a hot flush.

Vera gave Dick an incredibly steely glare. ‘Mr. Brunel’, she said coldly. ‘Surely you could not have forgotten about your sister?’

Dick gulped. There was an uncomfortable silence. He delved deep within his memory to recollect what Taylor had told him. Or was that the problem? Maybe Taylor hadn’t actually mentioned any sister. Was Dick being tested?

‘Are you all right Mr. Brunel?’ Vera enquired. ‘You look, well, a tad worried’.

Dick *was* worried.

'Well?' Vera pressed him for an answer with obvious impatience in her voice. 'Your sister?'

The more Dick tried to think of a response, the redder and sweatier he became. He looked at the door but Vera was blocking any escape route. Then, after a moment, an expression that was more than a smirk but less than a smile crossed his lips.

'Louise is my *step* sister', he said. 'She lives in Plymouth and she's fine, thank you'.

Vera nodded and almost smiled herself. 'Goodbye Mr. Brunel'.

Dick found his way back to the elevator and punched the button. He hoped the voice had announced 'Ground floor' but Dick thought it had warned him, 'You won't get away with it!'. It wasn't until Dick reached the ground floor and walked out into the bustling street that he let out a huge sigh of relief and a rather noisy fart. After all, the interview had been extremely nerve-wracking.

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Following the detailed instructions given to him by Taylor, Dick took the Metropolitan subway back home. It was clean, smooth and punctual. 'What was it about dictatorships that always made the trains run on time?', thought Dick to himself before realising it was probably the threat of severe physical punishment to the railway managers that inspired this sort of efficiency. A brisk ten-minute walk from the station later, and Dick had reached the sanctuary of Abode 168756, his new home. He'd been over his cover story countless times: he'd just moved into the area from south London and he was renting this furnished apartment from a friend. In reality it had been owned by a previous member of the Resistance who had just moved to Manchester, for both a new job and to transfer to the movement there.

Dick fumbled with his key card, walked through the empty lobby and then took the elevator to his apartment. Closing the door behind him Dick leant against it, shut his eyes and emitted an enormous sigh. For the first time in ages he felt very alone. Up until now he'd been in the constant company of colleagues in the Resistance. Now the job interview was over Dick had time to relax, which was good, but it was also bad because this meant he also had time to reflect. Dick hadn't experienced loneliness in a long, long time. In constant demand all of his adult life he was virtually always in contact with someone. Of course some of these contacts were more intimate than others but there was always somebody who wanted a piece of him. Now he had no one to talk to. No one to phone. No one to e-mail. Worse, no porn

to look at. Dick sighed then threw off his jacket and kicked off his brogues before exploring the apartment in detail.

Off the hallway was a bathroom, a kitchen that opened up on to a living / dining area (dominated by a huge flat screen TV) and a bedroom (dominated by a slightly less huge flat screen TV). Examining the wardrobe and chest of drawers, Dick was pleased to see that the Resistance had kindly provided him with a selection of clothing and accessories he'd need to blend-in; everything that the well-dressed would-be Assistant Communications Under Manager would be wearing this season. They had also supplied him with a small computer terminal. This tour of his new home didn't take long since it was quite small. In fact, compared to Dick's condo in 2010 it was absolutely tiny; he reckoned he could fit this whole apartment in his old guest suite. It was, Dick thought, so small that the mice probably had hunchbacks. It was, he thought, so small that you could turn off the bedroom light and jump into bed before it got dark. It was so small that… well that's enough old jokes for a while.

After the ordeal of his interview Dick decided he needed a stiff drink. On opening the fridge he found the term was relative; all he found in it was a bottle of full fat milk and some lime cordial. Dick mixed the cordial, drained a whole glass, then slumped down on the couch. He needed company — and fast — and the best solution to take his mind off the situation seemed to be the television. Trying to find something to catch his attention Dick channel-hopped. The problem was there was only one government-run TV channel, so channel hopping was actually limited to turning the TV on and off. The novelty soon wore thin and Dick decided that watching what was on was preferable to watching what was off. That afternoon he saw programmes about canal construction, iron ore mining, locomotive pioneers and embroidery. Unable to keep his eyes open, a combination of general tiredness and the soporific programme content, Dick took himself to his bed and fell into a deep sleep.

He was rudely awoken to the sounds of the Leader addressing him. Well not him personally, but all of the population. He reached over to his small bedside table and looked at his pocket watch, one of his new fashion accessories, to see it was 6am. Dick rubbed his eyes and looked again. It was still six am. Dick had heard rumours that there were actually two six o'clocks in each day, but he hadn't been able to verify this. Now he could, and he didn't like it, especially since it was a Saturday. The stress of the interview must have really taken its toll; he rarely woke this early or slept this long. The appearance of the Leader was pre-empted by very loud music emanating from the TV. Dick liked jazz, R & B, soul, pop, garage, rock, rap and hip hop. In fact there were only two styles of music he absolutely couldn't bear.

One was world music and the other was brass bands. The good news was that the New Victorians weren't into nose flutes and making clicking noises at the back of their throats. The bad news was that they seemed to have a real affection for tubas, euphoniums and trombones.

The other bad news was that when the Leader spoke to the nation it wasn't possible to turn the volume down, or in fact, the TV off (Dick would later discover that the television would automatically turn itself on at six in the morning every day). After the music died down Dick had to sit through various messages and proclamations from the Leader about increased coal mining and hovercar production statistics that were mind-numbingly tedious. The only thing that kept his attention was the leader himself. He was a reasonably handsome man with full beard and moustache and a very smart three-piece suit. Dick thought he looked familiar. He racked his brain trying to think whom he reminded him of, narrowing it down to one of the security guards at the Ministry of Information or a man he saw presenting the programme on canals the previous night. Then Dick realised that most New Victorian men looked the same; this was a society where to be different was to be dissident.

The Leader's dull announcements were followed by boring pronouncements. These in turn were followed by more strident brass band music. Dick went to take a shower, only to find the loudspeakers in the bathroom, and in fact every room in his apartment, were all broadcasting the Leader's proclamations. To block out the din Dick tried to shower with his hands over his ears only to find this was impractical, especially when it came to trying to wash his hair. He worked out how to control the water pressure and temperature with his elbows but when it came to applying the shampoo and massaging it into his scalp, well, no matter how hard he tried, he had to remove his hands from his ears. With the sound of massed trumpets and flugelhorns still ringing in his head, Dick dried himself.

He was contemplating how he would spend the day when the TV announced that it was time for the monthly bromide injection. He was instructed (or rather, commanded) by a severe voice to place his fist through a rubber-sealed hole in the bathroom wall. The Resistance had briefed Dick all about this and he remembered having a giggling fit when Taylor first told him the name of the process: fisting. Although it resembled one, Dick fully understood that this opening in the wall was not a 'glory hole'. Inserting his penis, Taylor stressed, would not only be 'wrong', it could also be incredibly and exceedingly painful. Inside was a device that injected the correct dose of sexual repressants into a vein in the back of your hand. Anyone not subjecting themselves to the monthly injection would be identified

and then investigated. The severe voice increased in severity and Dick did as he was ordered, first placing his flat palm on the scan plate next to the opening. There as a bleep and a light flashed green as his ID chip was read. Dick then gingerly inserted his clenched fist through the rubber seal. Two more sounds followed. One was a buzz and the other was a yelp as the injection took Dick by surprise.

Although the Resistance's efforts at creating pornography were at best extremely soft-core and at worst, complete shit, what they were good at — or so Dick was told — was technology, and this included developing an antidote to the repressants. Taylor had told him that a member with a pharmaceutical background had managed to create pills that neutralised the chemical injections. They lasted for about a month, were completely undetectable, and quite amazingly, worked. Resistance members took their dosage when they were at the headquarters; it was far too dangerous for pills to be kept anywhere else. Dick had been told that it was not uncommon for the security forces to enter homes when they were unoccupied and conduct random searches for pills, party criticism, pornography or anything else deemed 'anti-constitutional', whether it began with a 'p' or not.

This impulsive thought about porn made Dick feel very aroused all of a sudden. Usually this was good but at this particular time it meant he had an itch he couldn't scratch. There was nothing remotely pornographic in his apartment, not even old copies of National Geographic or that edition of Reader's Digest with the feature 'I Am Jane's Breast' which would always do in an emergency. Then Dick had a thought. Or to put it more accurately, he thought the unthinkable. He went to his jacket pocket and took out his wallet. He carefully unfolded one of the banknotes provided to him by the Resistance and examined it. There was a depiction of the Clifton Suspension Bridge on one side. He turned it over. He couldn't… could he? Would he? He had to.

His trousers were straining under his bulge and he had to find relief in some shape or form. The form was Queen Victoria whose portrait graced the other side of the currency, an indication that the Party still held her in very high esteem. In the privacy of the bathroom Dick dropped his trousers and looked longingly at the banknote. He was sure Victoria had been young and attractive once. The problem was that the engraving that had been used showed her in her dotage and it took every single ounce of Dick's imagination to make her appear even slightly alluring. It wasn't long though before Dick got into the swing of things.

'That's it queenie! You know you want it!', Dick thought to himself. 'Kneel on that throne and take it all, you filthy monarch whore! I'm going to fuck you, you sovereign slut! That's it. Hold on to

your crown Vicky! Take my sceptre! That's it baby, you dirty royal bitch! Take it! Take it all! I'm going to fuck your imperial brains out. Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes! YES!'

A combination of Dick's great imagination and even greater desperation meant the banknote did the trick. It was a much more relaxed Dick who shortly afterwards left his apartment ready to face the day and explore his new surroundings for the first time.

CHAPTER 9

Dick was worried about meeting any of his new neighbours since he knew they'd be curious about the newbie on the block. His plan was to try and avoid them for as long as possible. 'As long as possible', of course, is open to interpretation. Given Dick's situation it could have been half a day, a day, a few days or a week. It could also have been fifty-four seconds and that is the precise length of time it took from Dick locking his apartment door to bumping into the pleasant thirty-something couple that were waiting for the elevator.

Introducing themselves as William (a teacher) and Mary (a doctor), they welcomed Dick to the neighbourhood. On the short ride down they asked Dick about himself and what he did for a living; he told them about moving to the area and his recent job interview at the Ministry and they wished him the best of British luck. It turned out they lived in the apartment opposite. After saying their goodbyes in the lobby William and Mary turned right out of the apartment block on to the street. Dick didn't really want to undergo any further questioning so he turned left. After a short while Dick checked that William and Mary weren't following him; they weren't. They continued to walk down the street in the opposite direction. However just as they were about to disappear around a corner they suddenly both turned around, saw Dick looking at them, and gave him a knowing wave. Of course, it could have been a friendly wave, but given the circumstances, Dick had his doubts.

Even in the short ride in the elevator he felt that William and Mary seemed over-interested in his background. He wasn't sure if this was just their natural neighbourly inquisitiveness, or because they were two members of the Party whose job was to keep him under surveillance and look for any signs that he wasn't quite who he seemed. Maybe, Dick thought, following the interview the Party already had doubts over his identity and they were waiting for him to say something or do something that would trip him up. As a precaution Dick decided he would treat anyone he met as if they were a Party spy. Heeding advice from an old condom slogan, he decided it was far, far better to be safe than sorry.

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Dick spent the day experiencing what it was like to live as a real New Victorian. He went looking for a coffee shop but the nearest he could find was a quaint tearoom that served eighteen varieties of

English tea and a selection of muffins and buns. Naturally, Dick smiled at the word buns, much to the confusion of the demure waitress who served him. Sitting in a window seat, Dick read one of the morning's newspapers which seemed full of the same sort of propaganda as the early morning TV broadcast. It seemed the Party had created stability and prosperity throughout the country but at the high cost of personal freedom. Nowhere in the entire newspaper, or indeed any of the other papers or periodicals that Dick read that morning did he see any example of sexual freedom or expression. There was a fashion spread in one of the magazines all about the latest bustles, and another about knickerbockers. And they were the sexiest things he saw.

Navigating via his street map Dick left the tearoom and walked some more until he reached a park with a boating lake. He was immediately struck by how family-orientated the New Victorians were. Husbands and wives were accompanied by smartly-dressed children walking obediently alongside or being pushed in prams. Dick noticed that these people didn't really walk, they strolled, seemingly oblivious to any of the time-pressures that Dick was used to. The more he watched them, the more Dick felt he was in a scene right out of Mary Poppins. To most people this would have been comforting, but for Dick, this just reminded him that right now he should have been in another movie. One of his own. Feeling maudlin is a bad enough state to be in but Dick suddenly also found himself gripped by a sense of melancholia. Combining like a chemical formula, the result of these two emotions bonding was a feeling of loathsome self-pity. Dick slumped down on a park bench feeling the weight of his own sadness, the responsibility that had recently been heaped upon his shoulders and, of course, the knowledge that he was now well and truly trapped in this new world.

'Jeremy! Jeremy!', a female voice shouted.

Lost in his thoughts, Dick failed to hear his name being called. Of course, it wasn't his real name, which was another reason why he didn't take much notice at first.

'Jeremy!'. The voice was louder. And nearer.

Dick still didn't realise he was being addressed but the persistent calling made him look up.

'Jeremy? Are you all right?'

The penny dropped. Dick shook himself out of his daze to see William and Mary standing in front of him. He panicked and in a reflex move, assumed his defensive kung fu pose, much to the astonishment of his new neighbours.

'Sorry. I was daydreaming', Dick stammered.

'What were you thinking about?', William enquired.

'Er… about my job interview', Dick replied, pleasantly surprised

how quick-witted his reply was.

'Are you still nervous about it?', Mary asked sympathetically.

'Of course', Dick answered, as earnestly as he could. 'I really want this job. I feel I've got a lot to offer to the Party and really want to assist them in their objectives. They stand for everything I stand for. It's so important that we maintain the ethical high ground and guard against moral turpitude…'

Dick stopped speaking, aware that he was in danger of sounding far too phoney and because he wasn't really sure what 'moral turpitude' meant; he'd heard someone say it once and thought it made him sound clever. It was one thing to be loyal to the Party and quite another to sound like he was giving answers he thought his neighbours, whoever they really were, wanted to hear.

'I concur entirely', commented Mary.

William nodded in agreement, adding, 'I bet a hearty luncheon will help you take your mind off the wretched interview. It will be our treat to welcome our new neighbour. It will be a good opportunity to get to know you.'

Mary looked Dick in the eye adding, 'Who would have thought we'd bump into you so soon?'

'I know', Dick added with a very weak smile. 'What are the chances of that happening? Unless of course, you've been following me all morning'.

Thankfully Dick didn't say that last bit but he thought it — and he believed it to be true.

Dick, William and Mary ate lunch in the park at a small café overlooking the boating lake. It was a friendly, enjoyable meal of cucumber and cream cheese sandwiches cut into neat triangles and served with a small side salad, followed by rhubarb pie and custard. Dick soon felt at ease with the company but still remembered to keep his guard up. Throughout, Dick drew on his acting skills to remain cautious while still appearing friendly. It was a tough balancing act but Dick was pretty sure he managed to pull it off. The lunch continued into mid afternoon, fuelled by a number of small glasses of sweet dessert wine. Dick wondered if his hosts were plying him with alcohol in an attempt to get him to loosen his tongue however all it did was make him feel maudlin again. Trapped in this future, he wasn't sure when he'd ever have a chance to use his loose tongue again.

Taking a slow walk home, Dick was invited into William and Mary's apartment to play some amusing parlour games; Charades, I Spy and Blindman's Bluff. Although these were not really amusing at all, these games were apparently a staple diet of home entertainment in this era. Afterwards they all watched a television programme about

the pioneers of bridge building. At ten o'clock William and Mary announced they were going to retire for the evening. Dick was horrified that his neighbours were going to bed at this time in order to get a good night's sleep before church. And he was even more horrified to hear that they insisted that he joined them in worship. Dick had only been to church five times in his life, for four weddings and a porn film, 'The Sexorcist' (he played Father O'Tool who had to banish demons from several young women by taking them up the aisle).

He slept soundly that night, his dreams interwoven with thoughts about that particular movie, a threesome with Susan and Alice and, disconcertingly, the stress-integrity calculations inherent in a suspension bridge. After waking at the same ungodly hour as the previous day Dick reluctantly got ready for Church. It turned out that William was church secretary; well-to-do, well-known and well-liked among the parishioners. He and Mary introduced Dick to the congregation, all dressed in their Sunday finery and all very friendly and welcoming towards him. The stress Dick felt being interviewed by Vera Darling was nothing compared to the strain he felt having to endure Sunday morning worship. He wished Taylor could see him now. Praying, singing and thinking good deeds all in the name of maintaining his new identity. This really was going above and beyond the call of duty.

After the service and the pleasantries of goodbyes, and many invitations extended towards him for future lunches, teas and suppers, Dick returned home. William and Mary were travelling out of town in their hovercar to visit Mary's parents for Sunday lunch. They graciously invited Dick but he even more graciously declined, saying that he was going home to have a restful afternoon reading and doing a jigsaw, which he'd learned, was another popular leisure activity of the New Victorians. William told him not to be too overzealous; he and Mary looked forward to helping Dick complete it at some point. Dick put on his best fake smile and told his neighbours that he looked forward that that very, very much.

Back home Dick spent the afternoon on his rudimentary computer researching more about the Party and the Leader. Unsurprisingly there was an immense amount of information about the Party but surprisingly little about its current Leader. He was spoken about, referred to and widely quoted — but there didn't seem to be much about his background, just the same old 'official' photos. Strangely, Dick couldn't find any references to his actual name either. He was The Leader, plain and simple. The Party obviously wanted to retain a high degree of mystique about him. It had been in power for years and years, in fact, Dick couldn't find reference to a time when the Party

hadn't ruled. As far as he could gather there were no free elections; Party members selected their own leader.

Dick couldn't figure out why none of the population openly objected to the way they were forced to live their lives but guessed if you've never been able to masturbate at will, enjoy a good tonguing or reach nirvana with identical twin swimwear models, you wouldn't know what you've been missing. The population were also totally unaware of the real reason for their monthly injections. They were told that the chemicals were for well-being, to increase resistance against illness and tooth decay, which was why they were so readily accepted. Providing these health benefits while maintaining a strong economy and a disciplined society made the Party extremely well regarded, which was why there didn't seem to be any dissent at all. And now Dick was being asked to destroy the status quo…

Engrossed in his research and thoughts Dick failed to notice a pinging noise that became progressively louder. Eventually its volume was such that Dick looked up, walked over to the phone and answered it. He had no idea who'd be calling him at this time, or in fact, at any time, but was thrilled to think someone wanted him. Excitement turned to disappointment when all he heard was the dialling tone. With the pinging becoming even more annoying and persistent Dick looked elsewhere for its source. He listened to all the household appliances, even the fisting hole, ever so slightly worried that a needle might somehow be inserted into his ear. Then he remembered the small slot in the wall near his front door. Behind a glass flap was what looked like a small index card.

The pinging noise ceased when Dick opened the flap and removed the card — the equivalent of e-mail in this communication and information-censored age. Dick scanned the typed message and punched the air in delight and relief. He hadn't felt this way since waiting for the all clear from a rather aggressive yeast infection courtesy of a very unhygienic co-star. Dick put the card down and smiled. He'd landed the job at the Ministry of Information. Now, he felt, he was a fully-fledged and paid-up member of New Victorian society. Now he could fight the enemy from within. Then, in anticipation of his mission, he let out another fart.

CHAPTER 10

Monday morning. Dick wanted to make a good impression on Vera so he arrived at the Ministry of Information a whole hour early for work. Each day he was becoming more impressed with the New Victorian efficiency. He'd only been offered the position the previous day but his photo pass and department handbook were already waiting for him at the main reception desk. After signing for these items and being scanned-in he was waved through to the elevators. This time he was sure the voice said, 'You're a cunning bastard and I'm keeping a close watch on you'. A minute later he reached the office that would be his home for most of the week, and probably quite a few evenings too, given the work ethic that Vera had explained to him.

Dick stood outside, gulped, sweated, gulped some more and adjusted his trousers, the material of which was beginning to chafe. Then, after more sweating, gulping and trouser adjusting he gingerly pushed open the heavy wood-panelled door. The room was far larger than he imagined. There were at least twenty desks in this open-plan office, plus one more on a raised platform at one end. At least he thought it was a desk. It actually looked more like a dumping ground for files and papers. Dominating the rear wall were ornate-framed twin portraits of Queen Victoria and the Leader. Dick looked at Victoria and smiled, remembering his guilty pleasure. He was sure she winked back at him and even waggled her tongue suggestively, but then realised this thought was pure madness so he immediately looked away and studied the room some more. Each of the desks had a phone, computer terminal and various in and out trays. The side walls were covered in miniature versions of the information posters that were created, Dick assumed, by this department. His eyes were still roaming the room when one of the huge piles of paper on the raised desk spoke.

'My! You're an eager beaver'.

'A what?', said Dick, taken by surprise.

'A beaver. An eager beaver', repeated the voice. It took quite a few neurons leaping synapses before Dick realised he was not listening to sentient paperwork but actually a human being seated behind, and entirely obscured by the files. Vera raised her head above the paper parapet and smiled a sort of half smile.

'Enthusiasm. I like that in an employee', Vera continued. 'The issue, Mr. Brunel, is whether this is Day One keenness and zeal, or whether you intend to keep it up'.

'Hello Miss Darling', Dick replied, 'I intend to keep it up as long

as I'm working for you'. He smiled back in an earnest manner, at least that's what he hoped he was doing. He hoped it wasn't a smile that implied 'I just made another double entendre at your expense you oppressive, work-obsessed stuffy dullard'.

'Splendid', said Vera, ignoring or not understanding Dick's remark. 'Now come here. Don't be shy!'

Vera beckoned and Dick approached. He felt less like he was approaching a desk on a platform and more like he was approaching some sort of raised altar where he was going to make a sacrifice. Himself. Vera cleared half the papers to one side so Dick could see her more fully. He forgot how large she was. And how uptight she dressed. Her cream blouse was buttoned all the way up to her chin and then a little bit higher. He hadn't noticed before but the blouse seemed to conceal a larger-than-average chest but he wasn't sure whether this was two large rolls of fat or indeed bosoms. The jury was out.

'I won't introduce you to your colleagues when they arrive as there are far too many. Plus of course, I don't have the time to do that and neither do you. I'm sure you'll get to know names but remember don't get too friendly. We're all here to work for the Party; this is not a social club'.

Lumbering down the few steps from the platform Vera continued.

'This is where you'll be working', she said, indicating a desk in the front row. 'I like to put my new staff where I can keep an eye on them, at least for their probationary period. That way I can tell whether they measure up. Do you think you'll measure up, Mr. Brunel'.

Dick smiled and he spluttered. In succession these expressions would be OK but simultaneously, as in Dick's case, it made him look and sound like a moron.

'Are you all right Mr. Brunel?', enquired Vera.

'Er, yes, Miss Darling', Dick replied, quickly trying to regain his composure.

'Well?', she continued.

'Well?'. Dick was confused.

'Well do you think you'll measure up?'

'Yes. Yes, of course', Dick replied. 'With my experience and loyalty I don't think you'll have any concerns about my performance'.

'Good'. Vera said without any trace of amusement on her face, her hand resting on one of his shoulders. 'I like to have staff who measure up'.

Dick felt confused. Confused and violated. Vera was the last person he expected to be touchy-feely but here she was, her hand resting on his shoulder asking if he measured up. And what was it she

asked earlier? 'Whether he could "keep it up?"'. Did she know more about him than she let on? Was she playing mind games with him? Or was he still overly paranoid and imagining things? Or, worse still, was this some weird and frankly, odious form of wish fulfilment on his behalf? Dick knew he was lonely but surely he couldn't be *that* lonely.

Fortunately Dick's thoughts were soon taken up by work. He wasn't sure whether it was luck, fate or the intervention of the Resistance 'mole' who arranged this job, but he was relieved at his first assignment. Given the wide-ranging remit of the department, Dick could have found himself working on projects about coal-mining production, armed forces recruitment, water conservation, shipbuilding or god forbid, bridge construction. Instead Vera handed him a pile of folders and a large box of research information on prostitution and told him to summarise the main findings in a report. Dick had never needed to visit a prostitute although a few of his co-stars had worked as hookers when they weren't filming and this had given him a good insight into the business.

Dick judiciously read though all the files and was genuinely surprised to learn that although prostitution was virtually unknown in this society, it did exist. For unknown medical reasons some men and women had developed a degree of natural immunity to the monthly injections. Unrepressed, this group needed far more frequent sexual gratification. The women among them had resorted to becoming prostitutes while the men had sought them out. This had been going on for a number of years although the Party had ensured that these activities were kept completely out of the news. Dick also learned that the Party had been exhausting huge amounts of police manpower trying to identity and track down the hookers and their tricks but this was an almost impossible task.

There were a few references to a 'Project Gladstone' among the files but Dick drew a blank trying to find out any more information about this. He worked well into the night on the report, adding his own comments and observations on the subject. It had been a long, long time since his last nine-to-five job and Dick had forgotten just how incredibly taxing it had been. He'd rather have sex all day long with a stream of incredibly hot women than work in an office but then again, Dick was always one for thinking the obvious.

It was very late and the roads and streets were deserted as Dick walked the few blocks from the subway towards his home. Footsteps were magnified in the silence and seemed to echo. At least that's what Dick first thought. After a short while he realised that he wasn't hearing an echo; he was listening to the sound of not just his footsteps, but also someone else's. Dick was being followed in the darkness. His pursuer at first trailed him from a distance but then

progressively became closer. Dick glanced around a few times to see an indistinct figure, apparently a man, approaching. His instinct was to run but he stopped just as he broke into a jog, deciding that this might arouse suspicion. Instead he halted, tensed himself and took long, deep breaths to calm his nerves as he turned to confront his follower. When the figure was within ten feet of Dick, it spoke in a rich voice.

'Sir, I am in need of a light for my pipe. By chance are you carrying a book of matches?'

The figure was now standing in the shadows just ahead of Dick. He was tall, wearing a heavy coat and scarf with a bowler hat pulled down low, or as low as you could pull down a bowler hat without looking silly or getting it jammed on your head.

'I am sorry. I don't smoke' said Dick, relieved that this was all the mysterious man wanted.

'Have you looked in your inside jacket pocket? I'm sure you must be carrying matches there'.

Dick stared at the man and backed off slightly, worried by this strange comment.

'I'm sorry. I don't have any matches'. Dick turned to continue his walk home.

The man gripped his shoulder firmly. More firmly than Dick would have liked considering he was a complete stranger and from what Dick could feel, fairly strong. To placate him and encourage him to leave, Dick reached into his inside jacket pocket to show him it was completely empty.

'There', Dick said reaching in to the pocket. 'There's nothing here…' he paused. 'Except for this… book of matches'.

Dick stared at the stranger then offered him the book of matches that had somehow found its way into his jacket. The stranger thanked him then struck a match to light his pipe. By the flickering orange glow of the flame Dick recognised the familiar face of Taylor. With the tobacco now alight, Taylor took a few satisfying puffs, exhaled with even more contentment and returned the matches.

'Here, take these back. You never know when you might need them', he said before adding more quietly, 'I'll walk the last few streets with you then I'll continue on my own. We can't be seen too long in public'.

Dick and Taylor exchanged confidences on the way back to Dick's apartment. Taylor had somehow known about his successful interview and subsequent appointment at the Ministry, and Dick told him about the work he was undertaking on prostitution. He also told Taylor all about William and Mary and how he was treating them with caution. Taylor agreed this was definitely the right way to behave and said

he'd try and find some background information on each of them.

'When will I meet up with you again?', asked Dick approaching his apartment block.

'Fairly soon', replied Taylor. 'After you've been working for a little longer we'll meet at the headquarters for a thorough debriefing. We can't meet too often in the open like this in case you're under observation. And from what you've told me about your neighbours, that sounds very likely'.

'How will I know when to meet, or even where?' asked Dick.

'Don't worry', Taylor said. 'We'll contact you in some way and tell you the arrangements'. Then, in a louder voice he added, 'Thank you for the match and for your companionship, sir'.

After shaking Dick's hand and doffing his hat he walked away leaving Dick outside Elm Grove Tower.

Dick reached his apartment and opened the door as quietly as he could to avoid waking his neighbours who were surely fast asleep by now. Before he went to bed Dick had two surprises. The first was a small envelope on the floor in the hallway that had obviously been slid under the door. It was a note from his neighbours; neat copperplate handwriting that congratulated Dick on his new job. Dick's heart raced. How did they know that he'd got the job? He hadn't told anyone. Was it some sort of warning. A 'be careful, we're watching you' sort of warning? When Dick next saw William and Mary should he ask them how they knew about his appointment, or just ignore it and remain cautious. Dick thought about it and decided that confrontation was not advisable; he'd just thank them for their kind thoughts and well wishes.

As he undressed for bed Dick felt in his jacket and retrieved the matchbook that had mysteriously appeared there. This was his second surprise. The matches were still there but they were different. The matchbook he had offered Taylor had been white. This one was brown. Taylor must have switched it. Dick opened the flap and saw a handwritten note: 'Dinner with Alice. Thursday 5th at 7pm. Pelican Café'.

Dick smiled. He was looking forward to seeing Alice again.

CHAPTER 11

Surprisingly, Dick found it relatively easy to get into the whole 'work' routine. He kept his pledge to Vera and threw himself headlong into his job since he wanted to impress her and gain her trust but also because he didn't have anything resembling a social life. Over the next few days Dick became acquainted with most of his colleagues who seemed on the whole, to be equally dedicated if not a little dull. It seemed a lack of charisma was a desirable, if not a mandatory trait, of Party employees, along of course with blind, unfaltering and unquestioning dedication. Most of his co-workers were men; the few women in the department seemed as uptight at Vera. They returned his smile readily enough but this, Dick decided, hardly constituted a 'come-on', so he kept his distance.

Dick got on with all his colleagues but there was one, Benjamin Faraday, who was very patronising towards him, seemingly resenting his presence in the department. Of course, this could have been Dick's paranoid imagination — only it wasn't. Benjamin had all but admitted it during one of their lunch breaks in the large self-service communal canteen on the 21st floor. On this particular day Benjamin sat next to Dick, just the two of them at a table. Although they knew each other superficially Benjamin took this lunch as an opportunity to formally introduce himself. He'd been working in the department for four years and because of his experience, assumed an air of superiority, looking down on Dick. This was actually quite difficult to do even when sitting down as Dick had about five inches over him.

Being quizzed about his previous experience, Dick gave minimal, matter-of-fact information. Benjamin also asked for his thoughts on Vera in a faux-friendly 'co-worker to co-worker' way but Dick was economical with his comments, just saying that he admired her dedication and skills. Benjamin was clearly jealous of Dick due to him being given more responsibility than was normal for a department 'newbie' and also because Vera seemingly looked favourably at him. Benjamin had a habit of making remarks that while not confrontational, were clear in their meaning. The essence of this particular conversation was that a) Dick had been lucky to get the job and b) that his inexperience would sooner, or later, make him slip up. Oh yes, and c) Benjamin would be keeping a close eye on Dick so that when b) did happen, Vera would know immediately and Benjamin would be restored to his natural place as Alpha Male in the department. Benjamin took his tray and rose to get up, winking at Dick and doing the whole gun/fingers thing.

If Dick had resented Benjamin slightly before this meeting, he

resented him even more now. It was the whole tone of the conversation and its underlying threats. And of course, the gun/fingers thing hadn't endeared him to Dick at all. It was obvious that Benjamin had dedicated his career to toadying up to Vera in an attempt to win her attention. It was also obvious that he'd been remarkably unsuccessful at this, which is why he hadn't been promoted. After thinking the whole situation through Dick pondered the different choices facing him. He could ignore Benjamin completely. He could befriend him to minimise any bitterness or ill-feeling between them. Or he could just say 'fuck it' and antagonise Benjamin even more. After considering the varying degrees of satisfaction he'd derive from these different options Dick's next course of action was obvious.

It started with calling him Benjy, which he absolutely hated, and also Benjy-Wenjy and Benjy-Boo, which he absolutely hated even more. It also consisted of Dick being blatantly obsequious to Vera when he knew Benjamin was looking, and making sure he was first in and last out the office every day. Benjamin was married so there were considerable pressures on him to return home at a reasonable time. Dick didn't really mind the late hours, after all, he was proving his 'worth to the party' *and* taking enjoyment from annoying a co-worker. Late nights and working at the Ministry at the weekend also meant Dick could avoid William and Mary, and any further probing or awkward questions that might arise.

By the start of his second week Dick had finished his comprehensive report and submitted it to Vera. In return she gave him the far less exciting task of reviewing the effectiveness of a recent recruitment campaign for the New Victorian Temperance League. The rest of the week was quite uneventful. Well it was until Dick was summarily summoned before Vera late one morning. He was sitting at his desk with his nose buried in paperwork, wishing his nose was buried somewhere else, when his phone rang. It was Vera requesting his presence immediately in Meeting Room B, which was located just down the hallway from the main office. Not knowing why he was needed Dick gathered up all the paperwork he was working on and rose, being careful to make maximum noise to attract the attention of Benjamin who, on cue, looked up. He gave Dick an expected and undisguised look of contempt; the sort of look you'd receive from someone whose presence had obviously not been requested at an important meeting. Given the way the Ministry and his department operated Dick had expected to join some form of sub-committee, steering group, working party or other form of organisational hell. He was therefore surprised on entering Meeting Room B to see Vera sitting there alone accompanied only by a thick file that was

positioned face down.

'Shut the door Mr. Brunel', she requested in a low voice. In most instances this would have made the speaker sound seductive but in Vera's case there was absolutely no chance of this happening. In fact, Dick thought, fingernails scraping a blackboard or the screams of burning orphans would have sounded sexier.

'This is a very confidential matter and privacy must be maintained at all costs'.

Dick closed the door and listened intently.

'I read your notes and insights into the matter of prostitution and incorporated many of them into my own report. My immediate superiors have been impressed with your input Mr. Brunel and I too, have been looking favourably on your aptitude and ability to date'.

Dick nodded, pleased at Vera's approval, but more pleased at the look of displeasure Benjamin was giving him through the small glass pane in the meeting room door, out of Vera's sight.

'In the very short time here your talents have been recognised. You are a man with experiences that belie your years Mr. Brunel and I feel you will be a great asset to the Ministry. Because of this and the work you have already undertaken, I am asking you to work on a special project with me. A very special project indeed'.

Dick was shocked, but in a pleasant way. 'I'm not sure what to say Miss Darling. I'm pleased you're happy with my performance so far and I am honoured to have been given the chance to work with someone as experienced, intelligent and…'

Vera interrupted his sycophantic comments and leaned forward in her seat. 'No one in the department must know about this task. Your cover story is that you are working on an urgent and secretive project about promoting reforms in education'.

Dick's eyes glazed over as he thought about scrutinising changes to standardised testing or gender-based inequalities in the sciences, but soon unglazed as he realised the education project was just a cover story. He let out a sigh of relief and Vera continued in the same low voice.

'Discretion and secrecy must be maintained at all costs. Because of the sensitive nature, a lot of the work will need to be done outside normal working hours. I cannot allow your colleagues here have any inkling about the real project'.

'Not even Benjy?' Dick enquired.

'Who?'

'Benjy-Boo'

'I don't think I understand…'. Vera had a puzzled expression.

'I mean Benjamin', Dick quickly replied, correcting himself. 'After all, he has much more experience than me'.

‘He has experience in years, yes’, Vera agreed. ‘But his ability is severely limited as is his capacity for creative thinking. He operates on a basic level of competence. Nothing more. Nothing less’. Dick already knew this but was happy to hear it from Benjamin’s immediate superior who added, ‘You are probably unaware but the main reason he is working in my department is solely due to nepotism, not as a result of his own skills. He has a relative in a quite senior position in the Party’. Vera was clearly annoyed. ‘I cannot abhor people being rewarded with posts that they have not earned through sheer hard work, determination and inherent ability, don’t you agree?’

Dick gulped but then agreed readily enough. ‘That is exactly how I feel Miss Darling’.

‘We are like two peas in a pod, Mr. Brunel. Two peas’.

Dick gulped again and thought that the pod would have to be unfeasibly large to hold Vera. In fact it would have to be less of a pod and more like four reinforced horse blankets sewn together with ropes or possibly bound with anchor chains.

Vera continued. ‘Here we are, two single people putting their work before relationships and their personal pleasure, people who have dedicated their lives to the Party. Two peas in a pod!’

Before he had a chance to contemplate spending time in close proximity to Vera, whether it was in a pod or horse blanket, she slid the file towards him and turned it over. The cover said, ‘Project Gladstone. Above Top Secret’. Dick opened the file and flicked through it. His eyes became wider and wider until, he thought, his eyelids would flip right over the top of his head.

‘Precisely’, said Vera, noting his reaction. ‘Given what you have just learned from a cursory glance of the file I am sure you recognise why the contents must remain absolutely confidential at all times’.

Dick nodded and hid the file within the papers he had brought into the meeting. He thanked Vera again for her faith in his abilities, rose and left the room. Still stunned by what he’d just seen Dick almost walked straight into Benjamin who was loitering by the door, trying to pretend he wasn’t. It wasn’t until lunchtime that the two of them spoke. Sharing a table in the canteen Benjamin was very inquisitive about why Vera had met Dick in private. Dick told him about the education reform project he’d been given but it was clear from his colleague’s reaction that he didn’t believe him.

‘Confidential?’, Benjamin said. ‘Firstly I doubt whether that sort of project would require that degree of secrecy and secondly, any work that confidential would not be given to employees still in their probationary period. You wouldn’t be granted that degree of responsibility until you’d been working here for at least six months. You’ve only been here two weeks’.

‘I know’, Dick continued, not looking up from his salad lunch and deciding that he would rile Benjamin even more. ‘But Miss Darling was pleased with my performance so far and said I was one of the few people in the department she could trust’.

‘That seems very unconventional and even improper’, Benjamin added in his usual condescending manner. ‘As a departmental head Miss Darling would know that new projects were allocated according to seniority. She would be aware of the procedures more thoroughly than anyone and would always comply with the right protocols’.

‘Ah yes’, Dick added. ‘But when she was asked to assign this project by someone influential in the Party, procedures sometimes have to be over-ridden’.

‘What do you mean?’, Benjamin asked with a hint of surprise and an obvious degree of panic in his voice. This little piece of information was not something he had expected to hear.

Dick looked up from his plate and leaned towards Benjamin. ‘This is very, very confidential’, he said in low, almost conspiratorial tones. ‘But I see you as a friend so I’m willing to share it with you’.

Before Benjamin had time to dwell on the fact that his colleague might have even considered him to be a friend, Dick continued. ‘I have a close relative in the Party who is keeping an eye on my progress’, he said, looking straight at Benjamin, who involuntarily spat out a mouthful of tea. He apologised for his ill manners and while he embarrassingly mopped his mouth and the table Dick delivered what he considered to be the money shot.

‘This particular Party member wants to speed-up my promotion. He reckons in a year or two Vera will get a transfer to another section and I could be running the department myself’.

If Benjamin thought that his mouth was now empty of tea he was wrong. Somehow a residual amount also found its way out with a splutter.

‘Stick with me Benjy and you could go places’. Dick gave Benjamin his wink and gun/fingers greeting as he rose from the table. Returning his tray Dick glanced at Benjamin sitting alone, deep in contemplation, his face contorted in a mixture of anger and confusion, a new rivulet of tea running down his chin.

The next few days passed quickly. Most nights Dick stayed late to study the Project Gladstone file, making copious notes and locking it in his drawer when he left. This project was hot. No, more than hot. Boiling. It was hotter than molten lava on a very hot summer’s day and Dick couldn’t wait to tell Taylor about it at their next meeting. During this time the change in Benjamin’s attitude was obvious to see. Gone were any sarcastic or critical comments aimed Dick’s way. Instead he kept a much lower profile and when the two of them did

come into contact, Benjamin would ask if he needed any assistance. Lunches were far more pleasurable and if Benjamin was dwelling on the remarks Dick had made recently (which he definitely was), he passed no comment. It was, Dick felt, exactly the sort of behaviour you'd expect from someone scared about Dick and the power and influence, through this mysterious relative, that he might be able to exert.

CHAPTER 12

In no time at all it was Thursday 5th and the long-awaited date with Alice. Dick had discovered that the Pelican Café was located halfway between the Ministry and his home and reached it with a quarter of an hour to spare ahead of his rendezvous. Dick sat at a corner table trying to remember what Alice looked like. It had been about a month since they last met at the resistance HQ. He shut his eyes to picture her face, the colour of her eyes and her hair, but had difficulty getting past her bosom. He could remember that quite clearly but the other details seemed a bit hazy. Dick was still trying to remember the rest of her when Alice's ample chest arrived, followed micro seconds later by the rest of her perfectly formed body. Dick rose to greet her, wanting to grab her shapely ass with both hands and poke his tongue down her throat but resisted this primal urge and instead shook her soft, shapely hand, the accepted greeting between unmarried men and women in this era. He noticed her perfume again, the same pleasant rose-scent he remembered from when they first met.

'I've missed you', Dick said, suddenly and awkwardly aware that it sounded a bit too familiar and even a bit too romantic; after all, he'd only met her a couple of times.

'It's good to see you again Jeremy'. Alice smiled and sat down facing him.

In low tones, Dick told her about his time at work, being guarded about what he said in case any Party spies were nearby, watching or listening. Nothing was said about his meeting with Vera or the special project. Outwardly, this meeting must be seen as just two friends catching up on their news and making small talk. They ordered a light supper and Alice told him, in very general terms, about her own week. Dick learned that Alice worked in the administration and shipping department of a company that designed and manufactured ladies' fashion accessories. A very modest and almost anonymous job he thought, but then again, one that was perfect cover for someone senior in the Resistance.

Dick wondered what jobs other members held down. Were they all as low-key as hers so as to avoid undue attention? Or maybe some members had high-profile public positions on the basis that the Party would least suspect them. Had anyone infiltrated the Party like he was attempting to do? Then he remembered someone had; the other person brought forward in time. The other 'One' whose identity had been compromised and who had never been seen again. Dick was about to get maudlin again when Alice asked him if he wanted a lift

home.

Dick accepted the offer of a ride, paid the bill and exited with Alice into the cool night air in a slightly confused state. He wondered exactly what the point of this meeting was. He hadn't passed any important information to Alice and she'd obviously been very careful with what she told him in case it compromised her real identity. He didn't know her real name, which company she worked for or where it was located. In fact the only things he did learn was that *the* colour for parasols this season was lilac, and there was a possible shortage of ivory inlaid handles for umbrellas – neither of which seemed integral to the success of the Resistance unless, of course, she'd been talking in some sort of code that no one had bothered to explain to him.

Alice's hovercar was parked a block away and they walked there in silence, passing a policeman who tipped his hat in greeting. To say the hovercar sped off would be a severe overstatement. It rose slowly from the kerb and travelled at a smooth, sedate pace. A few seconds into their journey Alice operated a small switch hidden behind the dashboard and let out a sigh.

'Now we can talk freely', she said.

'What do you mean?', asked Dick.

'I've just turned on the scrambler device'.

'I don't know what that is, but it sounds illegal', Dick added.

'Definitely'. Alice smiled. 'All members of the Resistance have them fitted in their vehicles. It stops the Party eavesdropping on conversations. If they are listening in, all they hear is the noise of static as if their equipment is malfunctioning or there's some form of electrical interference'.

'Do you think hovercars are bugged?'

'I'm sure some are', replied Alice. 'Probably at random but we can't afford to take any chances'.

'But if you're under any sort of suspicion couldn't the Party just tail you?'

'Tail me?'

'You know, follow you from a distance', Dick explained.

'They could do that, but in addition to the scrambler, I also have this device'.

With that, Alice reached into her handbag and showed Dick an ornate hairbrush.

'Very nice. Is that for making sure your hair looks good just before they stop you? What do you do with the the one phone call you're allowed when arrested? Ring the salon to get some highlights?'

Dick's attempts at humour were completely lost on Alice.

'Open the back', she said.

Dick examined the hairbrush and after a few seconds located a

small, almost-hidden clasp. The back clicked open to reveal a small screen and flashing lights.

'Some sort of tracking device', Dick guessed, smiling. 'The Resistance *has* been busy'.

Alice told Dick that this detected the exact frequency on which the Party's communications equipment operated and determined the proximity. That way Alice knew if the security forces were following her by road or foot. The silence of the device indicated they were safe so Alice carried out a planned detour that would take them to the Resistance HQ.

'In the compartment ahead of you is a blindfold', she said.

Dick reached inside and put it on without complaint. 'It's OK. I know the drill'.

'What drill?' It was time for Alice to frown.

Dick smiled. 'It doesn't matter', he said, sinking low into his seat and closing his eyes behind the blindfold. 'Just tell me when we get there'.

About thirty minutes later Dick was aware of the hovercar gradually slowing and then stopping, the doors opening with a hiss. Alice helped him out. Wherever he was, it was quiet. There were no audible clues at all to indicate where he might be. Dick realised he had no way of telling whether the HQ was actually located half an hour away from when he first put the blindfold on, or even five minutes away. For all he knew Alice could have been driving around and around aimlessly for most of that time to confuse him. As Taylor had said, the Resistance couldn't afford to take any chances.

They entered an elevator, rode a few floors then exited, walked a bit further and entered another elevator. Alice had her arm through Dick's to guide him and he began to feel aroused. He put this state down to a combination of factors. For a start, there was his natural, perpetual horniness. Then there was the gentle movement of the elevator and the effect this was having on his chaffing trousers. Plus of course the fact that he was wearing a blindfold and was helpless at the hands of a busty, attractive woman. If that wasn't the start of a harmless fantasy then he didn't know what was.

Then a thought struck him. 'You know you said the Resistance was careful', he asked Alice. 'Well how do they know that I don't have some tracking device on me as well? They could have planted one on me without my knowledge and have been monitoring me even as we're speaking'.

'You haven't', Alice added confidently. I have a device on me that can detect that'.

'Don't tell me', Dick said with more than a hint of sarcasm. 'It's hidden in your lipstick'.

‘No’, answered Alice. ‘It’s disguised as a broach. My lipstick contains a small homing beacon’. Before Dick could ask any more questions the elevator stopped with a shudder and the doors opened with a dull clang. Alice escorted Dick along a corridor. He was aware of turning two corners and then stopping. After a moment Dick heard a buzzer sound and after another moment he heard what he assumed was some sort of intricate locking mechanism. It was. Alice gently ushered him through an open doorway and removed his blindfold. Dick immediately rubbed his eyes to adjust to the familiar sight of the Resistance HQ closely followed by the other familiar sight of Taylor welcoming Alice back with a passionate embrace. So she was *his* girl. Dick was relieved he’d reached the headquarters safely but this positive feeling was tinged with a slight feeling of jealousy. Taylor and Alice separated. The Resistance leader regained his composure and smiled at Dick.

‘Welcome back’, he said, shaking Dick’s hand firmly. Dick looked at Alice and then looked back down at Taylor’s hand, thinking about Alice and where Taylor’s hand must have been on numerous occasions. Dick wanted to take this hand and smell it, right here, right now, licking each finger one by one to see if there was any residual taste of Alice on them, but then realised how odd and disturbing this would be. Instead he spluttered something about being glad to be back and just how much he had to tell them about his experiences to date.

Taylor and Dick retired to the lounge area where a small crowd had gathered. Along with the familiar faces of Susan, Grace and Edward there was a rather stupid-looking older man named Humphrey. Taylor explained without any sense of irony that he worked in intelligence. It was his role to co-ordinate all the information the Resistance collated and try and make sense of it, in particular anything relating to the rumoured secret weapon which was being developed. Warmed by the fire and by brandy in his belly Dick told the group about everything that had happened to him since he had moved into his apartments and started at the Ministry. He told them about William, Mary, Vera, Benjamin, his other work colleagues and his recent report on prostitution. Humphrey nodded and made copious notes. Taylor nodded too, but this was the sort of nod that implied, ‘Yes, yes, I’ve heard all this before. Get on with it and tell me something I don’t know’.

He demonstrated far more interest when Dick told them all about Project Gladstone, the secretive project Vera had entrusted him with. Project Gladstone was basically an exercise in entrapment. The Party had wanted to eliminate prostitution, both the ‘fallen women’ *and* their clients, but the problem had been identifying any of them. Most of the prostitutes plied their trade in the City, a relatively small but

bustling commercial area in London's East End. It was here that they'd find wealthy clientele in the banking, legal and insurance businesses while the busy, labyrinthine streets made the area extremely difficult to police. Yes, the Party was aware of certain haunts frequented by the prostitutes but it took a disproportionate and unacceptable level of police manpower on surveillance missions to arrest anyone caught soliciting.

What was needed was a far more sophisticated method — which is how and why Project Gladstone came about. In Dick's era this would have been known as a honey trap; using an attractive-looking woman posing as a prostitute as bait for unwary men whose minds were ruled not by their hearts, but by their groins. The Party had considered using some of its female members in this way but their time was deemed too precious to be used to round up a few sexual malcontents. Apart from the practical manpower issues Dick believed this plan had a fundamental flaw that had never been acknowledged; most female Party members were so unsexy and unglamorous it was doubtful whether they'd attract any men at all, no matter how sex-starved or desperate they were. So, given the shortage of women able or willing to pose as prostitutes, the Party approached the problem laterally. They made them.

'Made what?', asked Grace.

'A number of super-realistic robots', explained Dick.

'What?', enquired Humphrey, frowning. Dick guessed he'd never heard of 'robots' before. Of course, it could have been any of the words in his last sentence like 'super-realistic', 'number', or even 'of' — but Dick was almost certain it was the word 'robots'.

'You know, mechanical people', explained Dick. 'In this case, mechanical women that looked, walked, talked and for all I know, fucked like real women'. Dick looked around at a room of stunned faces. Even Alice who Dick had noticed was not the most expressive of people looked slightly shocked.

'That's incredible!' exclaimed Taylor.

'It's hard to believe that they were so authentic that anyone would be fooled', said Edward. 'Nothing could ever be that realistic!'.

'I've seen detailed pictures of the robots', explained Dick. 'And you'd really think they were actual fresh and blood. From all the information I've seen their skin was soft, their bodies were warm, their movements were fluid and they were all, how can I put it… anatomically correct'.

Cue another frown from Humphrey.

'He means they had holes in the places they should have holes', Susan explained to her naïve colleague.

'Exactly. I'm not sure whether anyone actually had sex with one

of them, or what it might have been like, but I believe that technically it *was* possible'.

'So on the surface', said Taylor, 'There was absolutely nothing to indicate that these women were actually non-human?'

'Well actually, on the surface', replied Dick, 'There *was* something. There was a small code embossed on the right inner thigh of each of the girls. It's a sort of serial number'.

Taylor raised his eyebrows.

'I know', Dick responded. 'It could have been placed anywhere. I think the engineers were in a state of permanent arousal working on this project and printing the serial number here would have been far more exciting than inscribing it somewhere more discrete, like on the soles of the girls' feet or behind their knee caps'.

Humphrey's expression indicated that he doubted the whole story. 'So there were mechanical harlots walking around trying to tempt sexually repressed men. That's all well and good but how on earth did the Party catch any of them "in the act?"'

'It was quite simple', explained Dick. 'The robots were programmed to send out a signal when they made contact with a customer. The security services would pick this up, trace their location — then pounce. The women would grasp and hold their clients until the police arrived. Despite their feminine looks they were very strong and could easily hold and subdue a man until he was arrested'.

With his audience listening intently, Dick continued. 'Fifteen mechanical prostitutes were produced and introduced about two years ago and in that time, nearly seventy men were arrested'.

'That doesn't seem like a lot', Grace commented.

'It isn't', said Taylor. 'But it's seventy men who, by seeking the prostitutes, demonstrated that they challenged the Party's edict about sex and rebelled against it. These men might have joined the Resistance. It's seventy extra supporters that we don't now have.'

'What happened to them?', Susan asked.

'I know this', Dick said smugly. 'It was in my report. They were given much higher monthly doses of sexual repressants in their injections to make them what the Party termed, 'normal'…

'Or they were killed', added Taylor.

'Killed? No way', said Dick, shocked.

'It won't say that in your report, Dick, but it's true. We know of a number of men that we've had under surveillance as potential members who've met with so-called "accidents", or just disappeared'.

Alice wasn't as shocked as Dick was, but still looked perturbed on hearing this news.

Taylor clenched his fists. 'Remember that beneath its benign

surface the Party is ruthless. Truly ruthless. That's how it's stayed in power so long and that's how it intends to maintain this status quo'.

'Which is why we have to crush and totally destroy this odious, evil regime', Alice said.

These words seemed incongruous coming out the mouth of someone who looked so innocent. Dick thought her delicate lips were better suited wrapped around his manhood rather than spouting anti-Party rhetoric. Alice was a riddle wrapped in an enigma wrapped in a hot body with great breasts, yet she didn't give off any hint of sexuality in a way that Susan or even Grace did. You could tell these were women who were absolutely gagging for it. And if Dick hadn't seen Alice's obvious affection towards Taylor he'd be convinced that she wasn't interested in men. But Dick's instinct had never been wrong. There was definitely a sexual volcano ready to erupt under her serene exterior. He wanted to feel the tectonic plates move when they made love and experience the burning lava of her love juice. Dick thought that was quite a good metaphor, but then he would.

With Humphrey still taking copious notes, Dick dropped his bombshell. A bombshell so unimaginably large that you could be in the deepest fallout shelter and still feel its impact. The fifteen robot prostitutes had recently gone 'rogue'.

It wasn't that they had turned against the Party; it was just that they couldn't be traced any more. An unknown fault meant that they were no longer emitting any tracking signal – but more importantly, nor were they capable of restraining their clients. This happened to all of the robots more or less around the same time, which implied some sort of inherent component failure. Dick strongly believed that the engineers should have spent more time on quality control than on creating a realistic artificial vagina.

The Party therefore had a situation on their hands where fifteen robot prostitutes were giving sexual pleasure to countless men, but they had no idea where they were operating. Worse still, it meant the prostitutes would continue providing this service until they powered-down, which would not be for another three or four years when their energy cells needed renewing.

Dick's task on the project was to try and find a way for these robots to be traced and decommissioned. The longer they were left to solicit customers, the more men would discover it was possible to be sexually fulfilled outside of marriage. The bigger implication of this was that these men would spread word of this to others who would then start questioning the Party and its policies. This, of course, could not be tolerated. Dick told his audience that the situation was so serious that the Leader himself was taking a very close personal interest in the project.

‘Would these robot things be the secret weapon we’ve heard the Party is developing?’, asked Edward.

‘It could be, but I doubt it’, said Taylor. ‘Even so, it gives an indication of their current technological abilities’. Turning to Dick he continued. ‘If you perform well on this project I’m sure you’ll be given greater responsibilities and possibly promotion. That means the chance to penetrate further within the Party’.

Susan leant forward and whispered something in Taylor’s ear. Dick was sure he saw him blush slightly. Taylor whispered something back to Susan and the two of them exchanged a few comments in this way. At the end of this brief conversation Susan looked crestfallen.

‘What’s wrong?’, asked Dick.

Taylor sighed before explaining. ‘Apparently this talk about penetration reminded Susan of something I mentioned to the Resistance when you first arrived’.

‘Taylor said you’d be able to educate us all about sex’, Susan explained. ‘I just asked him if you’d be able to give me… I mean us… a lesson this evening but Taylor said it was too short notice and that you would need more time to prepare’.

Dick looked at Susan who smiley coyly and licked her lips. And that’s when he found his role change from one of informer to one of educator.

CHAPTER 13

Dick felt uncomfortable standing in front of his 'class'. Here he was, with no warning, no notes and no visual aids about to give an impromptu Sex Ed lecture. He wondered if he was even qualified to teach sexual techniques, after all, he'd had no formal training. All his knowledge was gained solely on the job. Dick surveyed the room. His pupils, eleven members of the Resistance who were in the building that evening, looked attentive and eager to learn, which was encouraging. Despite this, he still felt nervous about addressing them. Then Dick remembered hearing about a technique to put public speakers' minds at ease. A way of calming nerves and overcoming anxiety.

It was only a few seconds into imagining his audience in their underwear when Dick realised this might not be such a good technique. He felt his eyes locking on to those of Alice and in that instant she was wearing a provocative black lacy basque and suspenders. Also in that instant he felt his penis wake from its slumber and perform an involuntary impression of an Apollo moon rocket. Dick glanced down and saw a growing bulge that threatened to cause alarm and embarrassment.

'Houston…' he thought to himself. 'We have a problem…'

To maintain the dignity expected of a teacher Dick had to terminate with extreme prejudice, any feelings of sexual arousal. By a process of trial and error Dick had long ago worked out what thoughts would achieve this altered state in the shortest possible time. In quick succession he rapidly conjured up images in his mind that would result in near-instant detumescence: getting his testicles caught in a rusty man-trap, being sodomised by Hulk Hogan, and having to de-lice the matted pubic hair of a swarthy and extremely sweaty, obese, leprous Turkish woman called Yagmur. In a supreme ordeal of mind over member his penis began to achieve, as Dick called it, a 'soft on'. Inwardly he let out a sigh of relief. Outwardly, however, he let out the same sigh.

'Is everything all right?', asked Grace, staring at Dick's crotch.

'Sure', replied Dick, glancing at his crotch to make sure everything was back to normal. 'I was just thinking about, er, what I would teach you'.

He was sure he caught Grace smiling. The sort of smile you get when a woman absolutely gagging for sex has noticed the onset of a thirteen-inch erection in your pants. Dick decided to move swiftly on.

'Right. For this inaugural lesson, or as I'll call it, the Dick S. Longg "Sex Masterclass", I'm going to teach you about sexual positions. I'm

not sure if you're all aware, but there are many, many more variations than the conventional Party-approved Missionary position that you know about'.

Cue much murmuring from the audience. 'To show you the wide variety available,' Dick continued, 'I'll need to conduct the lesson with the help of a volunteer'.

Faster than a speeding bullet, three hands immediately shot up in the air. Unfortunately these three hands belonged to Edward, Humphrey and George, a tubby smiling man Dick hadn't seen before, but who was sitting quietly at the back.

'Er… that's not what I meant actually', Dick said trying to conceal the disgust and horror in his voice. 'I need to demonstrate the positions with a wom…'

Dick didn't even have to finish the word (which was 'woman', in case you're wondering. Not 'wombat'; that would be the subject of his Masterclass on marsupials. Or perversions). Four women in the audience had anticipated this word with almost superhuman reflexes and even now, their eager hands were clawing the air in an attempt to get noticed. The volunteers were Susan, Grace and two other fairly attractive young women who he hadn't met before, Louise and Charlotte.

'Is there anyone else who'd like to be considered?', Dick asked, disappointedly looking at Alice whose hands remained firmly clasped in her lap.

'Are you sure?'

Susan, Grace, Louise and Charlotte made lots of enthusiastic grunting noises.

'Last call for volunteers. I know, we could start at the beginning of the alphabet. Is there anyone here whose name begins with an "A"?'

Alice failed to get the hint. Or if she did, she decided she'd rather observe and learn than participate. Dick sighed and gave up. 'OK then, let's go with…' He covered his eyes with one hand (actually he was peeking through his fingers) and waved his other hand around seemingly randomly at the four women. Eventually it stopped. He took his hand from his eyes; he was pointing at Susan. He saw looks of disappointment on the faces of the other women. And, very worryingly, on the face of George.

Susan joined Dick at the front of the room and during the course of the next twenty minutes or so, he demonstrated, fully clothed, as many sexual positions as he could think of. These ranged from the basics such as the Spoon, the Monkey Hump, the Rocking Recliner and Doggy Style, right through the more interesting Cowgirl, Reverse Cowgirl, Sitting Bull, the Wheelbarrow, Sidewinder, Leap Frog, the

Lotus Position, the Drive-Thru, the Butterfly, the Backdoor Mailman, Scissors, Hoovering the Floor, the Armchair, Playing the Cello, Sleeping Beauty, Upturned Turtle, the Ballerina, the Diving Bell, the Crab, the Praying Mantis, the Bodyguard, the Hayride, the Little Big Horn, Standing Tiger / Crouching Dragon, Sitting Bull, Prison Guard, Big Brother, the See-Saw, the Matrix, Persuading the Debtor, the Drunken Hillbilly, Bumper Cars, The Jelly Fish, Plumber's Mate and the Incline Leg Press.

Drawing on all his years of experience Dick also demonstrated some of the far more advanced positions, warning that these required considerable practice and a very high degree of suppleness; positions like the Piledriver, the Rampant Sloth, the Viennese Oyster, the T-Square, Deep Impact, the Flying Karamasovs, the Strap Hanger, the Two Headed Crab, the Incumbent President, the Scream Machine, the Angry Fireman, the Frothy Latte, the Pineapple Harvest, the Triple Lindy and the infamous Oprah Straddle.

Naturally, even after a few seconds of simulating the first position, Dick's rocket was in full flight again. 'Fuck it', he thought, and just continued with the lesson. His students were engrossed watching the positions, making copious notes, and everyone seemed oblivious to what was happening in his trouser department. Everyone, that is, except Susan who reached orgasm at least five times with all the bumping, grinding and dry humping. Setting an exhausted, almost comatose, Susan down Dick received a standing ovation from his class. As the applause died down it was Taylor who, as the spokesperson for the group, thanked Dick profusely for educating them this evening without prior warning. It was also Taylor who then suggested that everyone paired-up and adjourn to the lounge and bedrooms for the next part of their studies; the practical.

Just over an hour later, the lounge and bedrooms resembled the aftermath of a gigantic orgy, mainly because that's exactly what had taken place. Dick had sex with all the women in the group numerous times in many of the positions he'd just taught. To his pleasant surprise they were all incredibly quick learners (even the Oprah Straddle had posed fewer problems than he had anticipated) and although Dick was still ready, willing and able to continue, everyone else was incredibly weary and very sore from all the action. As he was getting dressed Dick pondered on the fact that all the people he'd met so far in the Resistance demonstrated an astonishing level of camaraderie. All of them except Taylor. Dick had come to this conclusion based on Taylor's reluctance to share his girlfriend with anyone; the two of them disappeared into one of the bedrooms alone, locked the door and had their sex in private. Dick wasn't sure if this

was due to Alice being coy or Taylor having an embarrassingly small penis, but whatever the reason, Dick felt Taylor was being very selfish.

It was now late and one by one the Resistance members said their goodbyes, thanked Dick profusely and departed. Taylor gave Dick a very strong handshake and slapped him on the back.

'Thanks for everything Dick', he said, smiling.

Dick saw Alice buttoning up her dress through a small gap in the open bedroom door. 'You're welcome', he replied through ever-so-slightly gritted teeth.

'I've got something for you', Taylor continued. 'A present'.

He handed Dick a small wrapped package that looked and felt exactly like a fountain pen. Dick thanked him and unwrapped what was indeed a fountain pen.

'But it's a pen with a difference', Edward explained, taking it from Dick's hand. 'Look'.

He unscrewed the barrel. Concealed under the ink reservoir were a small circuit board, some wiring and a miniature battery.

'It's a homing beacon', Edward explained. 'Taylor's an electrical wizard. He's just developed it'.

They're not difficult to make, said Taylor modestly. 'All our members have just been issued with them. They're concealed in lipsticks for the women and in pens for the men'.

Dick took the pen back and examined it.

'If you're captured or in any form of danger, you can activate it by turning the clasp twice counter-clockwise and then once clockwise'. Taylor demonstrated and the pen emitted a barely audible bleep. He switched it off again. 'It's got a range of about four miles and will alert other resistance members to your exact location, give or take a few feet'.

Edward continued the explanation. 'If there's a member in the vicinity they can hopefully trace the signal and then come to your assistance'.

'Hopefully?' Dick enquired. He'd heard that word quite a few times in connection with Resistance activities and it didn't, well, fill him with hope.

'Well, yes'. Edward nodded. 'If we're able to help a colleague then we will'.

'And if you can't?', Dick enquired.

'Let's not worry about that unless it ever happens', interrupted Taylor. 'After all, it's not a problem until it's a problem!'.

This comment was, Dick thought, as comments went, not a particularly helpful one.

'The electronics are well concealed in the pen', Taylor added, quickly changing the subject. 'But on no account must you ever let

this fall into the hands of the Party. As you can imagine, that would have disastrous consequences'.

Dick thanked Taylor again for the device and told him he'd be very, very careful with it. With that he placed it in his inside jacket pocket, shook Taylor's hand again and said his final goodbyes. George looked particularly disappointed as he left.

Blindfolded once more, Dick was escorted out of the building, this time by Edward who dropped him off a few minutes' walk from his home. The ride was uneventful; both men lost in their own private thoughts. Dick collapsed into bed and that night, slept the sleep of the dead. Or more accurately, the sleep of the blissfully shagged.

CHAPTER 14

The following two weeks saw Dick working in parallel on a new assignment at the Ministry; a publicity campaign in support of the forthcoming 'National Hat Week'. When Vera first told him about this project Dick's instinctive reaction was to exclaim, 'What the fuck?!' Fortunately, however, he managed to correct himself in time and what he actually said was, 'What the fedora?!'. Of course, this didn't make any sense at all but at least it was hat-related. Just from his observations so far Dick knew that everyone in this society loved hats. The women loved them because they were a fashion item that could be changed according to whim or the season. The men loved them because they could doff them to women and appear courteous. And everyone loved them because they kept them dry(ish) when the weather was inclement.

A small team in Dick's department was responsible for creating a real buzz about National Hat Week, making it an exciting, stimulating and compelling event. Dick wasn't sure that this was at all possible as he immersed himself in statistics about hat wearing, hat manufacturing, hat distribution, hat history, hat accessorising, hat care, hat pioneers — in fact anything and everything about hats. He found this a completely unstimulating exercise but threw himself into it like a loyal Party member.

Benjamin was part of this team so there was regular contact between the two of them. Although he hadn't demonstrated any recent signs of resentment over Dick apparently being lined-up for promotion, Dick still didn't trust him. He had the distinct feeling that everything he did or said was being scrutinised by his colleague. He wondered how long it would take before Benjamin discovered through his own sources that Dick didn't actually have a close relative in the Party. And once he found this out, would he delve deeper into Dick's past and discover that as far as this world went, he didn't actually have one?

They were the last to leave a particularly dreary bowler hat sub-committee meeting when Benjamin asked Dick how the 'secret education project' was coming along, trying with varying degrees of unsubtlety to find out exactly what it was about and why it was so secretive. Dick wasn't sure if this was because Benjamin wanted to show willingness in trying to help him or whether he was just snooping.

Of course, there might be another reason. Dick didn't know where this particular idea originated. At first he thought it was just another example of paranoia on his part and he tried to dismiss it but the more

he dwelled on it, the more he thought there could be an element of truth about it. It was an alarming thought; that Benjamin might actually also be a member of the Resistance… But if he *was*, then what was he doing here? Maybe Benjamin had been planted in the Ministry like Dick to find out about Project Gladstone and feed information back to Taylor. But why, Dick pondered, do this if he already had it covered? Was it that Taylor didn't have enough faith in Dick, and Benjamin was there as a back-up? Did Taylor see Dick as being expendable and if something happened to him — and by that he meant something bad — he'd have another operative in place to take over where Dick had failed? Or, even more alarming, was Taylor actually planning to sacrifice Dick in order to throw the Party off the scent of the Resistance? After all, if Benjamin compromised Dick's identity and Dick was arrested, it was unlikely the Party would consider there were two people who'd infiltrated the department. And this would mean Benjamin could continue his work virtually above suspicion. The Resistance would never do this, would they? But then again, maybe the end justified the means?

The more Dick thought about this, the more confused he was. He'd been told that he was 'The One', but based on what he'd learned, that actually didn't mean much. Perhaps Benjamin was 'Another One'. Perhaps there were actually lots of 'Ones' and the Resistance purposely kept them apart. Maybe the Oracle had seen them all in her dreams as if she was counting sheep. Is that what all the 'Ones' had been. Just sheep; all eventually heading for the slaughter? Dick felt his imagination running away with him. He didn't like the feeling and was desperately trying to catch it up. The longer he dwelled on it, the more worried Dick became. Given the huge secrecy that Taylor sought to maintain around the Resistance, Dick wouldn't have put it past him to have a devious plan like this. He was still trying to keep up with his imagination when he felt a strong, manly hand on his shoulder. Dick turned round to see Vera standing next to his desk with a quizzical, yet still stern, look.

'Mr. Brunel, are you all right?', she said in her low voice, leaning towards him. 'You seem lost in your thoughts'.

Dick shuddered in his seat, shaking himself out of the world of paranoia and into the world of his unsightly boss invading his personal space.

'Yes Miss Darling', Dick said, quickly composing himself. 'I was, er, thinking about the Project and possible solutions'.

'Good show, Mr. Brunel', said Vera, who'd now moved even more uncomfortably closer, her slightly greasy nose almost nuzzling his ear. 'I want to discuss that with you after work'.

Part of Dick interpreted this as a work-related request but there

was a small, teeny-weeny part of him that interpreted it as a chat-up line (although not a very good one, granted). The last two hours passed very slowly as Dick contemplated spending even more time in the company of Vera. By six thirty only Dick, Vera and Benjamin remained in the department. Being his normal, toadying self, Benjamin asked Vera if she wanted his assistance that evening. Without raising her head from the pile of files that perpetually covered her desk Vera waved her hand to dismiss him as if she was shooing away a particularly irritating fly. Dick buried his head in his work trying to avoid the inevitable. The thing about the inevitable, however, is that it always happens. In this instance the inevitable was heralded by the sound of a large heavy report being slammed shut. The noise startled him.

'Right', said Vera standing up from her desk and rubbing her sweaty hands together. 'Quality time on Project Gladstone'.

She walked passed him and locked the department door.

'Can't take any chances. The Resistance might have spies anywhere'.

She looked at Dick, and from her raised eyebrows, was either expecting a response or was suffering from some form of involuntary eyebrow spasm.

Dick replied with as much naivety as he could muster. 'You don't believe that, do you?'

'Mr. Brunel, as servants of the Party we cannot afford to take any chances whatsoever. The Resistance are an insidious, evil bunch of malcontents who would stop at nothing to frustrate the ambitions of the Party. They could have agents anywhere. An office cleaner or maintenance person for example might walk passed this room or even enter it, cunningly looking for information or just eavesdropping on conversations'.

'Do you think that's true. I mean, that members of the Resistance are here among us?', Dick asked, watching and shuddering inside as Vera dropped the office door key into her ample cleavage like some poor unfortunate victim falling into a dark, bottomless pit.

'It is highly unlikely given the employee screening processes in place, but that does not make it impossible', Vera replied, walking towards Meeting Room A. 'Which is why we cannot afford to take any chances. Bring your documentation in here so we're further shielded from prying eyes or ears'.

Dick wasn't exactly sure whether ears could be prying but he unlocked his desk drawer, removed his report and joined Vera in the meeting room. She locked the door and hid this key exactly as before. Dick shuddered again. Vera explained that there had been a disappointing response so far. No one involved with Project Gladstone

had come up with a practical, workable or even sensible solution to the problem. Someone had suggested that the police should be given special powers to poke all women with a knitting needle. If they didn't shout then that proved they were man-made. Someone else proposed that the mechanical prostitutes could be identified by placing large and powerful magnets on every street corner. Another idea involved keeping every single woman in London immersed in salt water for two weeks to see if they exhibited signs of rust. Faced with this level of thinking and incompetence the Party hierarchy and the Leader himself were becoming nervous and agitated that it was taking so long to solve this particular problem.

With a sigh that indicated 'here goes nothing' Dick opened his folder. He took Vera through his notes and outlined his thoughts, cautiously at first as he wasn't sure if they would be viewed as too crazy, but then with greater conviction as Vera demonstrated an unexpected high degree of enthusiasm about his plans. For his solution to succeed, Dick explained, he needed access to, and the co-operation of, the engineers who had designed and built the original mechanical prostitutes. Vera scanned his report, nodding at regular intervals then folded her arms, her face contorted with what Dick interpreted as a very, very slight smile.

'Mr. Brunel', Vera said, leaning back in her seat which protested with a groan, 'Your solution, while radical, some might say even outrageous, has a ring of possibility about it. Your plan seems practical and effective! It's not every day that I get excited, in fact it's very rare that I get excited at all, but today is one of those days! If you can condense these thoughts into a proposal I will pass it to the Party with my recommendations that it is given the most serious consideration'.

'I've already taken the liberty of preparing such a document', Dick said, reaching into the back of the folder and presenting Vera with a few sheets of paper headed 'Executive Summary'.

'Mr. Brunel, you are truly remarkable!'

There was that very slight inkling of a smile again which was becoming disconcerting. Dick smiled back.

'You haven't shared these thoughts with anyone else I hope?' Vera asked.

'Of course not', Dick replied with a shake of his head.

'And everyone still thinks you're working on that education project?'. Dick nodded.

'Good, good. Just checking. You will of course receive full credit for your solution but if it is adopted and effective, we will both bask in the glory of its success'.

Dick was pleased that his proposal, while inventive and definitely

a long shot, would be championed by Vera. He saw a ticker tape parade in his honour; being carried shoulder high and having a shiny medal pinned on his chest by the Leader himself. His imagination was running away with him again — but this time in a good way.

'Stay here. I won't be a moment', Vera said retrieving the meeting room key from the depths of her bosom and getting up. 'There's something I need'.

She returned minutes later not holding yet more papers or files as Dick had expected, but a large bottle of brandy and two glasses. She locked the door once more, set the bottle down and filled the glasses.

'I keep these locked in my filing cabinet for special occasions', she explained. 'It's outside of regular working hours so I think we can do this without feeling too guilty'. She raised her glass and Dick followed suit. 'To a genius idea Mr. Brunel, a genius idea!'.

They clinked glasses and toasted potential success. It would have been all right if they had stopped there, put the bottle, glasses and papers away then went home. But they didn't. Toasting Dick's proposal was swiftly followed by toasting it once more. Then again. Then again. Then Vera proposed a toast to the Party. Then the Leader. Then the Ministry of Information. Then the downfall of the Resistance (Dick suggested this toast to make sure he came across a true Party supporter). From then on the toasts became just as frequent but increasingly obscure. To the production of more bridges. To increased steel production. To the digging of more canals. Deeper ones. To more colourful hovercars. Green ones. To more comfortable office chairs. Brown ones. To toothpaste with a more minty taste. To shiny shoes. To carpet. To the sky. To the letter 'J'. To even numbers. To prime numbers between one and twenty. To words that don't rhyme with anything, like orange, mirror, month and purple.

Each toast was preceded by the filling of glasses and followed by the downing of their entire contents. By the time they'd toasted the office carpet for the third time, having completely forgotten the two previous mentions, the brandy bottle was empty and Dick was feeling particularly mellow. He wasn't sure exactly what Vera was feeling but he had a good guess as she lunged forward across the table and grabbed him, prising his lips apart with a snake-like tongue. This totally unexpected and inappropriate gesture from his department manager caught Dick completely unawares. As Vera's darting tongue probed deep down his throat threatening to find his spleen, Dick found himself simultaneously caught in her strong grip. In a clumsy but powerful, and ultimately irresistible move, she yanked him up from his seat and embraced him. Dick's mind was hazy under the influence of so much brandy but as far as he could remember he'd never wrestled with a large bear before, and most definitely not one

that was squeezing his buttocks in an overtly sexual manner. He was sure though, that if this ever happened, it would feel exactly like this. In extreme conditions the body produces extra adrenaline that gives it almost superhuman strength. Dick felt certain this was happening to Vera but in this case her strength wasn't used to outrun enemies or raise a car off an accident victim, it was used to force him down on the meeting room table. He was thinking about whether he should resist or comply as Vera straddled his wriggling body, pinning him down by his hands. She leant forward, her breasts smothering him.

'I need you Jeremy. I want you', she slurred. 'I want us to make the beast with two backs'.

Dick was in danger of suffocation and decided to save his breath for breathing rather than waste it on talking or crying for help. Unfortunately for him an increasingly passionate Vera took his lack of response as a sign of consent. Still straddling Dick, she sat back. Dick caught his breath and gasped. Transfixed as if he'd been staring at a gorgon Dick could only stare in horror as Vera began to unbutton her blouse. Her discarded top revealed a corset which look liked it had been made from a tarpaulin and which demonstrated the same structural engineering skills that had built the railways or canals, and which certainly contained the same amount of metal work. Vera's hands were now fumbling with the various cords and fixings that kept her large body safely contained.

By now Dick had conceded that resistance was futile. His expression had changed from that of someone caught staring at Medusa to that of a deer caught in headlights. Except that in Dick's case the headlights were Vera's enormously saggy breasts. Instinct took over and Dick found his hands involuntarily reaching up and fondling them. They felt like two enormous sandbags and just as sexually stimulating. Kneeding them gave Dick no pleasure at all but Vera moaned like an animal; in this case, road kill gasping its last agonising breath before expiring. The amount of brandy consumed would have dented any man's libido but Dick wasn't any man. By instinct his penis grew in response to Vera writhing and grinding her hips in slow circles. She looked down at the growing bulge in his trousers.

'Take me here, you sexual beast', Vera cried, dribbling. 'Relieve me of my maidenhood!'

If Dick was worried before, his level of concern had just crept into the red. Not only was he about to have sex with his boss in the workplace, but he was about to take her virginity. Dick panicked. Not just at the gruesome and hideous task that was about to befall him, but because Vera would surely comment on the size of his penis and report him. Dick thought back to his dream when he was exhibited as

a medical curiosity, and what had happened. Of course, there was a chance that in Vera's drunken state she might not remember the exact details of what was taking place. Dick was still mulling this over while Vera unbuttoned his trousers and fiddled with his zip. Plunging her hands in deep through his fly as if she was at a fairground lucky dip stall, Vera soon found a prize. She gasped as thirteen inches of Dick's dick were relived from the confines of his underwear and sprang to attention.

Vera gasped and stared, the response Dick had come to expect when women clasped their eyes on his erect penis for the first time. Dick thought for a moment that she would go into shock. He'd seen it in many women, several of whom had to undergo CPR and one who was temporarily admitted to a sanatorium. Vera's constitution, however, was as sturdy as the rest of her. She blinked twice, licked her lips three times and demonstrating an unexpected degree of athleticism, wriggled and writhed, somehow simultaneously hoisting up her skirt and undoing an enormous pair of split-crotch knickers that looked as though they had been made from the same type, and quantity, of fabric that covered airships. Dick knew the inevitable was about to happen and he did what anyone what anyone would do in his position. Lie back and think of England. Vera wriggled some more and tried to lower herself on Dick's rigid member. Dick thought of that joke about how do you make love to a fat woman: you roll them in flour and look for the wet patch — but at this precise moment it didn't seem funny at all. With each bounce Dick felt that irreparable damaged being down to his internal organs. He thought he heard his pelvis cracking. Or it could have been two of his ribs. Or a vertebrae. Or all of the above.

Vera's hymen, it seemed, was like the New Guinea rainforest; unexplored and impenetrable. The whole experience, Dick thought, was futile, like running full pelt at a huge rubber sheet stretched across a road and trying to make a hole in it. However after many attempts and many variations of angle, Dick eventually managed to enter Vera in the classic Cowgirl position. This was not so much making love as being impaled. At first Vera screamed the sort of scream after you tread on an upturned plug with bare feet, but as she bounced up and down her cries of passion soon turned into what Dick thought sounded like whale song. Albeit a whale that had been harpooned and which was being slowly and painfully winched towards a Japanese factory ship.

Dick matched each of Vera's bounces with a thrust. And Vera matched each of Dick's thrusts with a more energetic bounce. For a while they were out of sync and the meeting room table started to vibrate and shudder across the floor. Dick thought that any cleaner or

maintenance worker still in the building would deduce from the commotion that the furniture in this department had suddenly become animated. Or that two really angry velociraptors were locked in a deadly battle. The table was banging against the wall before Dick and Vera's thrusts coincided and a rhythm started to develop. A rhythm like that of Burundi war drums but a rhythm nonetheless. Eventually Vera went stiff. As stiff as Dick. She threw back her head back and uttered once last primeval, guttural scream.

The following silence was deafening. Vera remained straddling Dick. Sweat was dripping off her face and hair on to his face and hair. A few salty drops went in his mouth and he gagged. Sensing her momentary weakness Dick tried to extricate himself from beneath her enormous thighs. It was like trying to escape from a giant mattress. A giant warm, moist mattress. Like an escapologist using extreme muscle control to liberate himself from a confined space, Dick managed to wriggle his way free inch by inch, sliding out from under her enormous bulk as she gently flopped on to the table.

Dick dressed himself and took stock of the situation. There was a massively semi-naked fat woman making the sounds of a buzz saw asleep on the meeting room table. Drawing on huge amounts of will-power to prevent himself from being sick, Dick used Vera's discarded blouse to soak up and wipe away any traces of sex from her sweaty thighs. The whole exercise was, he felt, like swabbing the deck of a very large and very smelly trawler after a record-breaking catch. But a hundred thousand times less fulfilling.

Summoning every single reserve of strength he had Dick dressed Vera as best as he could. The keys to the meeting room and the department door had flown out once Vera had removed her corset. Dick retrieved them and after a short while, returned to the room pushing the trolley that delivered the mail each day. Fortunately the trolley was almost the same height as the table so it was a relatively simple task to roll the still sleeping Vera on to it. The trolley groaned and one wheel buckled but Dick managed to push her back into the office and up to her desk. He didn't have the strength to lift her up to her seat so Dick rather unceremoniously pushed her on to the top of the raised platform. Vera's head hit the floor with a dull thud that made Dick wince but which remarkably, failed to rouse her.

Going back into Meeting Room A, Dick moved the table back into the centre of the room and with a cloth, wiped it clean of any traces of bodily juices then threw away the bottle and glasses. He knew the ultra efficient air conditioning that kicked in an hour before work would remove the tell-tale smells of brandy, sweat and sex, while the garbage compactor programmed for the same time would take care of the rest of the evidence. Before he left Dick looked once more at the

peaceful Vera laying next to her desk. He wiped some drool from her mouth and adjusted her clothing as best as he could. Dick thought she would probably wake up after a few hours and take herself home. Looking at her current state he doubted whether she'd remember much about of what happened; the problem was that he did.

He felt dirty, cheap and violated. He shook as if a whole platoon of soldiers wearing heavy boots and 60lb combat packs had just walked over his grave. Then he shrugged. At least he'd got laid.

CHAPTER 15

Vera didn't appear the next day at work; her staff was told she was feeling unwell. Dick looked around at his dull colleagues and wondered if any of them had the remotest idea about what had taken place in Meeting Room A. He sincerely hoped they didn't. Vera returned to the office the following day and if she remembered anything about their liaison, she didn't reveal it, well not until just after lunch. Dick was in the large reference library on the eighteenth floor when Vera appeared at the end of a narrow corridor of books, blocking both the light and any chance of escape.

'Mr. Brunel', Vera whispered as she approached, 'I must sincerely apologise for my behaviour the other evening'.

'Shit!', Dick said, quite loudly.

'Pardon', Vera said, slowly approaching.

'Books!', Dick said. I said 'books'.

Dick knew that 'books' didn't sound remotely like 'shit' but it was the first thing he thought of.

'Books', he continued, 'There's so many here. And they're really useful for my research'.

Vera was now completely within his personal space. Not as completely as she was on the meeting room table the other night, but still uncomfortably close. If she had been confused about the shit/ books reference she didn't show it.

'As I was saying, Mr. Brunel. What happened the other night was totally out of character and I can only put it down to a combination of loneliness on my part and a wish to celebrate your magnificent proposal'.

Dick turned round because he thought Vera was looking at something interesting on the shelf directly behind him. He turned back again and realised that she was in fact looking directly at him, waiting for a reaction.

Dick didn't know whether to comfort Vera who genuinely seemed full of remorse over what had taken place, or laugh the whole episode off. But then he thought if he did comfort her she might take this as a sign that he wanted to continue the relationship, and he wasn't sure if his internal organs or spine could stand the strain. Of course, if he laughed it off she might think that he didn't care and that he had just taken advantage of her, and this might turn her into some 22nd century bunny boiler. Dick was considering this dilemma and whether he was safe as he didn't actually own a rabbit, when Vera moved even closer to him and whispered in his ear.

'I'm sorry I thrust myself upon you like I did'.

Dick gave a half smile. ‘That’s OK. I wasn’t sure if you would remember what we did’.

‘Remember? How on earth could I forget! How many times did we do the deed? I think it was eight or nine times. Probably more’.

Dick gave another half smile. He knew he could satisfy women but could one fuck with him really feel like eight or nine?

‘No. I think it was just the one’, Dick replied.

‘Poppycock!’, Vera exclaimed, emitting a sort of cackling laugh that caused a few other employees in the library to turn their heads in their direction.

‘I might not remember all the details of that evening but we definitely did it more than once. Otherwise, how could I feel like I did? I’m still very sore’.

She punched his shoulder, supposedly in a playful manner, but with a force that he was certain had left visible bruising. ‘There’s no need to cover up for me Mr. Brunel!’. She leaned towards him, ‘And thanks for cleaning up all the stickiness after I’d passed out. You were a true gentleman’.

Dick shuddered. He’d shuddered a lot since he arrived in 2150 but recollecting what he’d had to do while Vera was unconscious more than justified the reaction this time.

‘Ah yes…’ Dick shuddered again. ‘The stickiness’. More shuddering.

‘I still had the taste on my lips’.

‘Your lips?’ Dick was confused. Perhaps more went on that night than he recalled. Perhaps they had oral as well and it was so traumatic that he’d forced the whole event into a dark recess at the back of his brain where it had remained locked away until now.

‘Yes. When I woke up I licked my lips and tasted the brandy’.

‘The brandy’. Dick frowned.

‘Yes. On my lips. What did you think I was talking about?’

Dick wanted to say semen. Or even spunk, jizz or man-goo. But he didn’t.

‘My memory is very hazy that evening but that taste is how I knew we spent the evening drinking. That and my sore head. She rubbed her temple and Dick had a flashback of Vera falling off the trolley. ‘I’ve never downed eight or nine large glasses of brandy in a single session before. No wonder I felt so ill’.

Dick sighed a huge, huge sigh. It was now obvious to him that all Vera had remembered about the night together was the drinking.

‘Yes. The brandy. We certainly put away a lot that night’. Dick mimed zipping up his mouth. ‘Don’t worry Miss Darling. What happened will remain our little secret. Nothing will pass my lips’. Dick winked, ‘Unlike the brandy’.

Dick was rather pleased with this quip and so, apparently was Vera who smiled and punched him again on the same shoulder, this time with even more force, breaking a few surface blood vessels. Dick smiled weakly.

'Thank you Mr. Brunel, I knew I could rely on your discretion. I just hope no one else is aware of what took place'.

'But what about when you left yesterday morning?', Dick enquired. 'Did anyone see you leave?'

'It was six o'clock and thankfully there was no one around apart from the security guards in the lobby. I just told them I'd been working through the night'.

With that, Vera winked again then turned on her heels and left. Well, she didn't so much turn on her heels as perform a manoeuvre like a super tanker turning in mid-ocean, but the effect was the same. Dick remained, contemplating what could only be described as a lucky escape. Vera had completely forgotten what had really taken place and was grateful that he'd keep quiet about the episode – plus, he didn't need to have sex with her ever again. If ever there was a win/win situation, this was it.

For the remainder of the day Vera never mentioned the episode. She never mentioned it the day after or the day after that. As far as she was concerned the event hadn't taken place and that suited Dick; it was almost as good as it never having taken place in reality. The routine of the workplace went on as usual apart from two things. The first was Vera disappearing into one of the meeting rooms with Benjamin, which hardly ever happened. Despite the fact that they weren't in there that long and both went straight back to their respective desks Dick could hardly contain his curiosity about what had been discussed. He found it difficult to concentrate for the remainder of the day but wasn't sure whether his relationship was such that he could just ask Vera outright, or whether he needed to skirt around the issue and wait for her to mention it. With his impatience getting the better of him Dick waited for an appropriate moment and then just came right out with it.

'I noticed you and Benjamin having a tête à tête earlier'.

'Hardly', Vera said. 'He wanted more responsibility and gave me a whole list of reasons why he should be in a more senior position here. It's obvious that he's jealous of you'.

'What did you say?', asked Dick.

'I told him that he has a review in a month's time and that I'd consider it. It's not that he's a poor employee… it's that well, he's just, well… er…'

'Average'. Dick finished Vera's sentence for her. 'With a small 'a''.

'That's it. Average. And the Party needs people who are better

than average. Mind you, I think the fact that it's you and not him working on the secret project has made him raise his game. Benjamin seems determined to prove himself so that must be a good thing'.

Dick was puzzled about his colleague's change of heart. Jesus might have turned water into wine but here was Benjamin changing resentment into motivation – and that seemed a greater miracle. But as significant as this was, the second thing that week which broke the office routine was even more noteworthy. This took place on the Thursday when Dick found himself in a meeting at the Ministry, seated opposite three severe-looking Party members. He and Vera had been summoned before them to review his recommendations for Project Gladstone. Dick thought that this was just another stage in moving his proposal up the slow decision-making ladder until it reached a point where it was rejected outright or disappeared in some bureaucratic development-hell never to be seen or heard of ever again. He was wrong.

He and Vera didn't know it but the three Party members they were facing were actually from the Party's Outer Sanctum, which meant they were one step away from the Inner Sanctum and one final step away from the Leader himself. Had he known this he probably would have slouched less in his seat, scratched his balls far more discretely and generally acted far more subservient. He was certain Vera didn't even know how important the three men were otherwise he was sure she would have warned him in advance or at least poked him in the ribs or kicked him under the table when he picked his nose.

Backed-up by Vera, Dick expanded on a few of the practical points of his scheme and the resources needed to ensure its success. His audience remained poker-faced throughout and there was an uncomfortable silence after he had finished.

'Miss Darling', severe Party Member One announced. 'You may be surprised to hear that we are not seated here to consider Mr. Brunel's recommendations'.

Dick gave a disappointing frown. That's not to say that he tried to frown but did it badly, but that it was a frown that indicated how disappointed he was at hearing this news. Vera remained silent.

'We are here to tell you that the proposal has already been discussed at length and it has the full support of the Leader'.

Vera and Dick looked at each other with equal expressions of astonishment.

Severe Party Member Two continued. 'We have already commissioned a thorough viability report and given the technical resources available to us at the present time, we feel your solution stands a fairly high degree of success'.

Dick and Vera smiled. Vera smiled because her reputation had

been immediately enhanced thanks to Dick's hard work. Dick smiled because his mind had wandered and he was thinking of what sex with Alice might be like, and also because he knew he'd just ticked the box about getting closer to the Leader.

Severe Party Member One continued, 'With immediate effect Mr. Brunel will be seconded to our Scientific Research Centre. Here he will assist the technicians working under the auspices of the Party's chief scientist, Dr. Hargreaves'.

Severe Party Member Three added, 'His absence from your department will be explained by the fact that was suddenly taken sick. To maintain this pretence we will ensure that Mr. Brunel's permanent record shows that he was hospitalised for a short time. You will both be given full details of the cover story. It is imperative that we maintain secrecy at all costs'.

'Mr. Brunel, you will leave here immediately', Severe Party Member Two informed him.

Dick realised he was about to be whisked away without the chance to reach Taylor and tell him what had happened. Would his sudden disappearance cause Taylor to think that his cover had been blown and he'd been terminated by the Party? Was this what had happened to the previous 'saviour' who'd suddenly and without warning completely disappeared? Maybe he too had been summoned to this Scientific Research Centre but this destination wasn't actually what it seemed… Maybe it was just a huge interrogation centre and he was being taken away to be questioned, tortured and have his penis removed…

Dick farted then looked disapprovingly at Vera, out of her field of vision.

'Mr Brunel', Dick became aware of Severe Party Member Two talking to him. 'We have to leave'.

'What? Right now?', Dick asked. 'I mean, couldn't I just have one more night at home. You know, for old time's sake'. Dick was stalling. He wished there was some way to get a message to Taylor. He had to have time to think.

'No. We leave now. Preparatory work is already underway and time is of the essence', added Severe Party Member Three. This time even more severely.

Dick fumbled for an excuse. 'What about my pyjamas? I need these to get a good night's sleep. I'm very accustomed to my pyjamas. They're so comfortable and relaxing and I might not be able to sleep in new ones. They might be all starchy and scratch. Or the wrong size or colour. I have to have ones with an elasticated waist, not a cord. The wrong ones might keep me awake and that would mean that I'm all crotchety and sleepy in the morning and won't be able to

concentrate on my work. And we couldn't afford that to happen'.

Dick was aware of everyone in the room staring at him, including Vera, with a look of bewilderment. Severe Party Member Two broke the silence, lifting a small suitcase on to the table.

'Mr Brunel. We have your pyjamas here. And some spare clothes and your toiletries. Do not worry'.

But Dick *was* worried. Very worried. He farted again. This time he pinched his nose and subtly wafted the air around him, still out of Vera's view. The Party had obviously entered his home freely, probably after he'd left for work that morning, and there was no knowing how many other times they'd done it. Dick mentally walked through every room in his apartment looking in drawers, cupboards, wardrobes and under the bed for any incriminating evidence about him or his mission, before deciding that thankfully there was none. Dick gave a half smile, the sort of smile you'd give to show you were grateful on being reunited with your pyjamas. Vera turned towards him and shook his hand violently.

'Mr Brunel, congratulations. We will miss you in the department but I'm sure I'll see you shortly. The best of British luck to you!'

Dick gave another half smile.

'Thank you Miss Darling. This is a great day for the Department and the Ministry. It is an honour to be able to help the Party in this way'.

He looked at the three Severe Party Members and hoped this sentiment came across with enough conviction for them to believe he was a loyal party member and not the resistance infiltrator who they were determined to unmask. He saw three poker faces and farted again. This time he leaned back in his seat, discretely pointed to Vera and mouthed 'It's her'.

Severe Party Member Two caught his eye and mouthed back 'We know'.

CHAPTER 16

The journey to the Scientific Research Centre was completed in darkness for two reasons. One it was evening and two, he was blindfolded, which was beginning to become a habit. He travelled for about two hours and the sounds of the city became less distinct, giving him the impression that he was somewhere in the countryside on the outskirts of London. Of course, this might just have been the impression the Party had wanted to give, in which case they'd succeeded.

On arrival at this sprawling facility Dick was subjected to endless security checks, cross-checks and cross-check checks. To his great relief his biometric chip withstood all scrutiny. Eventually he was handed an identity badge and directed to a small side room. As he headed towards it Dick felt slightly calmer. He was sure that if he were going to be interrogated, he wouldn't have undergone all these identity checks. He didn't know what to expect in the room but was fairly sure it wasn't going to include a bright light, electrodes or something very pointy. His hunch was correct; it was empty. After a few minutes a woman entered, the first female Party member he'd met who wasn't unattractive, stern and officious. She was unattractive, stern and extremely officious.

Her name was Lucy and rather than administer a beating she gave him a brief tour of the facilities. If she was trying to conceal the fact that she begrudged the fact that Dick was there, she wasn't doing a very good job about it. Any questions that Dick asked, whether about the facility or Lucy herself were met with the same degree of brusqueness or indifference. She either didn't realise how important Dick was, given his role in finding a potential solution to the renegade harlots. Or she did, and just didn't give a shit. Dick felt Lucy's condescension was due to the fact he was a mere 'civilian', neither a Party member nor a scientist. He wanted to stop her, spin her around and shout in her face, 'Do you know who you're talking to?' but he decided not to, as he wasn't sure that the work he'd done so far justified this arrogant outburst. After all, it wasn't as if he'd found a solution to the three biggest problems ever to face mankind: global warming, male pattern baldness or erectile dysfunction.

To be honest, the tour wasn't that interesting. Most of the doors they walked past were marked 'Top Secret' and those that weren't, were just various anonymous-looking laboratories. Dick wished he could appreciate what he was being shown, but he couldn't. One large white sterile room with equipment in it looked just like any another. Once he'd seen one centrifuge, gas fluid analyser or dynometer then

he'd seen them all. Lucy eventually showed Dick to what would be his temporary quarters. She wished him goodnight in the same way that someone would say 'go fuck yourself' and strode off. Dick showered and got into bed. He smiled, relieved that this location was exactly as it had been described. It was a centre for scientific research and not the interrogation centre he feared. He fell asleep thinking about success; being invited to meet the Leader, destroying the secret weapon then assassinating the ruthless despot and changing the course of history forever. Then he got bored with this notion and instead fell asleep thinking about Alice, a bunch of seedless grapes, a table tennis bat and a big tin of chocolate body paint.

Work started in earnest the next morning. Well, that's not exactly true. Work started in earnest for the technicians and scientists involved in Dick's solution to Project Gladstone. While most of the team were wielding screwdrivers, wrenches, pliers, spanners or studying paper read-outs and computer punch cards, all Dick could do was observe. This was the nearest he'd come in his life to a feeling of impotence and he didn't like it. Not one single bit. He was used to being very hands-on in everything he did and here he was, looking on from the sidelines. He wasn't even permitted to wear a starched white lab coat and this hurt his feelings even more.

Dick learned that a lot of the basic engineering and programming functions were carried out on the lower levels of the building, while the assembly and final testing of equipment was done on the eighth and ninth floors, where he was now. Most of the technicians here treated Dick with the same sort of disdain and discourtesy that Lucy had demonstrated on his arrival. On the few occasions when he was asked his views or comments, these were quietly noted. On the few occasions, when he volunteered his views or comments without being asked, these were just as quietly ignored.

He met the Chief Scientist Dr. Hargreaves, a short, stocky man, just once. He was, Dick thought, too short to be a scientist, let alone a chief one. He introduced himself in an annoying nasal voice and shook Dick's hand in the manner of someone having to shake a turd. Dick passed comment about some of the work in progress. Dr. Hargreaves nodded, giving Dick the sort of look you'd give someone who didn't know the first thing about incorporating a reverse polarity zener diode into a conductive armature resonance coil. As well as making Dick feel impotent, this also made him feel small. And that was something else he'd never experienced.

The Scientific Research Centre was the sort of environment that made the ten days Dick spent there feel like twenty. And those twenty feel like fifty. But even though Dick was bored, fidgety and fed up, he could see progress slowly being made.

Finally the last wire was connected, the last bolt tightened and the remaining diagnostic check carried out. It was D-day; the day of the demonstration which was set to take place in a small ground floor auditorium. Dick, Vera and Dr. Hargreaves were seated behind a large desk to one side of the stage. In front of them were two plain velvet curtains suspended from a sturdy metal framework and near to these was a fake brick wall. The setting had obviously piqued the curiosity of the various scientists and Party members in the audience who consulted notes, murmured, or did both. Dick felt a painful twinge in his upper leg and winced. It was Vera gripping his thigh. She turned and leaned towards him, forcing him back with her voluminous bosom.

'Are you nervous Jeremy?', she whispered.

'A little', Dick replied looking around at the audience which seemed, en masse, to be studying him.

'So am I', Vera admitted in the same low voice. 'And when I get nervous I have to squeeze something tightly. It helps me relax'.

With that, she gripped his leg with more force than Dick could imagine was possible from anything other than a hydraulic press. Dick flinched and decided that he also wanted to squeeze something tightly; the part of Vera's body that connected her body to her head. Vera indicated the various high-ranking Party members in the audience but the names meant nothing to Dick. He had hoped the Leader would be there in person but Vera explained that he made few personal appearances, relying instead on reports from various subordinates who were sitting here expectantly, waiting for the demonstration to begin. Dick took the hand-written speech out of his pocket, holding it tightly in his nervous fingers, re-reading it for the eighth time. The speech thanked the audience for attending and the team for their hard work. It then went on to explain the various problems in trying to find a solution for Project Gladstone, giving the audience a broad outline on the demonstration they were about to see. It was, Dick felt, a very inspiring speech and one that had taken a long time to compose.

Dick was reading it for the ninth time when Dr. Hargreaves stood up to energetic applause. As this died down he began the proceedings by thanking the audience for attending, and for his own team's hard work. He explained the various problems in trying to find a solution for Project Gladstone and then introduced Vera. Vera stood up and gave the audience a broad outline of the demonstration they were about to see. She then introduced Dick who realised that everything he was about to say had just been said. He looked around the auditorium and opened his mouth. No sounds came out so he closed it. He then repeated the motion a couple of times. To the audience

Dick looked less like Jeremy Brunel, the man who had devised the brilliant solution to Project Gladstone, and more like Jeremy Brunel the Great Goldfish Impersonator. Feeling the sheer weight of expectation on his shoulders, all he could do in the circumstances was to shrug them.

The only thing Dick could think of saying was the very matter-of-fact and not very inspiring, 'Could we raise curtain number one?'.

On cue a junior technician at the side of the stage turned a switch. A mechanical winch slowly raised the first curtain number until it revealed a life-sized mannequin dressed as a prostitute, which is to say that it was attractive, displaying an excess of make-up, stockinged-leg and cleavage.

'Ladies and gentlemen', Dick explained. 'A prostitute, with which you will all be familiar'.

Half the audience gasped. Dick couldn't make out what the other half were saying as they were all talking at once, although by their tone he could tell they were incensed and disgusted. And probably more than a little appalled.

'What I mean', Dick quickly added, trying to defuse the situation, 'is that you will be familiar with mechanical prostitutes'.

More gasps.

'When I say "familiar"', Dick went on, 'I mean "have knowledge of", not have intimate relationships'. Now he was babbling. 'And when I say "have knowledge" of, it's not a metaphor for sexual relations'.

By now the audience were quite confused. Some of them were angry at the implications of what Dick was saying, but most of them were just confused. Dick thought it was best if he just kept talking.

'Although authentic-looking in all respects, this prostitute is in fact a mechanical one especially constructed from the original plans to resemble one of the fifteen 'rogue' harlots currently on the loose'. Dick felt he'd said enough about prostitutes, mechanical or real and, mopping his brow, continued. 'Raise curtain number two!'.

The same junior technician operated another switch and curtain two started to rise. It was just two feet from the stage floor when the winch gave a mechanical groan which abruptly turned into a mechanical death rattle. The curtain suddenly stopped. The audience stared at the two brown checked trouser legs that had been revealed beneath it. The junior technician frantically turned the switch on and off several times. To Dick's relief it began to raise again, revealing more trouser leg. Then it again stopped suddenly at waist height. One of the Party members seated at the back shouted, 'Rubbish!'.

Sensing that this momentous demonstration was rapidly deteriorating into a momentous farce Dick rushed over to the side of the stage, punched the junior technician in the face and ripped the

second curtain down. Falling to the platform floor it revealed another mannequin; this one was a smartly-dressed gentleman in his thirties. Glaring at Dr. Hargreaves, Dick made a caustic remark about how he hoped the non-functioning curtain was not indicative of the technological skills of the good doctor and his team. In response to this comment he heard some sniggering from the audience and this made him feel better. This was Dick's way of getting back at the technicians for excluding him. And especially for not letting him wear a white lab coat.

The mannequin wore a smart brown checked suit, a matching waistcoat, shiny black brogues, a light blue silk shirt, a dark blue cravat and a tan coloured bowler hat. He was very handsome and extremely dapper. If the audience were impressed with his appearance then they didn't show it. Dick looked at them and they looked back at him. It was a look that hunched its shoulders and implied 'So?' One important-looking gentleman seated at the front peered through his monocle.

'Is that what all we've come to see? A smartly-attired dummy?', he said scornfully.

'No', Dick retorted, now becoming angry. 'If I just wanted you to see a smartly-attired dummy I'd have invited you to look in a mirror'.

The monocle man blustered and harrumphed and before he could get any more words out Dick had walked around to the back of the prostitute mannequin and flicked a hidden switch at the nape of its neck, concealed by its long hair. The prostitute mannequin's dull eyes glimmered, brightened and adjusted their focus. At the same time the figure shifted the weight on her feet, adjusting her balance and improving her posture. She looked around the room and smiled. Everything about her looked real, from her skin texture, her subtle facial expressions and the rise and fall of her ample bosom. Especially the 'ample' bit. She was, Dick thought, scarily human and even more scarily, scarily sexy.

Dick moved over to the male figure and operated the same concealed switch located just under its collar. It powered-up and came to life in a similar way. Dick looked into its eyes and shivered. He wondered if a mechanical man who was responding to a series of programmed algorithms and other words he had overheard but didn't understand, could show menace. This one seemed to. Both figures stared at each other. Dick stared at his audience.

'Lady and gentlemen', (Vera was only one lady present and although her recent predatory behaviour had been far from lady-like, Dick thought it was only right to address her in this formal way). 'This mechanical male will be sent into the seedier parts of the City in an attempt to flush out the concealed harlots. A handsome, strong figure;

well-dressed with an air of confidence and the trappings and deportment of a wealthy man. Behold! A man willing and able to pay for sexual congress'.

The audience continued to look intently at Dick as he stood between the two motionless figures. 'This man will, no doubt, attract the attention of the harlots. This demonstration will show how we expect any liaisons to play out'.

With that, Dick moved away from the figures and took up a position to the side of the stage near to the junior technician who, in a reflex as Dick approached, ducked down, holding his hands to his face. As if on cue (which it was, because that's how she was programmed), the prostitute smiled at the man and raised her skirt and petticoats to reveal a cheeky garter on her shapely stockinged leg. The audience gasped at this wanton display of brazen sexuality. Outwardly they were shocked and horrified at what they were seeing. Inwardly however they were pleased they'd taken up a career as Party members or scientists because it meant they could freely observe a lady in her underwear as part of their job (and let's face it, not many jobs outside of doctors and morticians allowed you this sort of opportunity).

Programmed to be attracted by the allure of the prostitute's behaviour, the mechanical man approached. The two figures linked arms and walked over to the wall on the other side of the stage. Leaning back against it the prostitute raised her skirt around her waist pulling the man towards her and thrusting her tongue into his mouth. The man pulled himself away and in one fluid move covered her mouth with one cupped hand, while reaching into his jacket pocket with the other. There was a silver glint as the ceiling lights reflected off a very long and very sharp knife the man had pulled out. Before the prostitute realised what was happening the knife had delivered a vicious slash to her neck. Despite the fact that the harlot was a machine, the visual effect of this attack was not diminished in any way. The blade had severed her main oil feed, sending a spray of warm, amber-coloured hydraulic fluid across the first three rows of the audience who were too stunned, and too sticky, to cry out in alarm. With the force of a butcher and the skill of a surgeon the man then delivered two further deep cuts across her belly, making it resemble a hot cross bun, albeit a hot cross bun that was haemorrhaging vital fluids at an alarming rate.

The prostitute's eyes dimmed and she slowly slumped to the stage. She writhed a few times as the last remaining volts of energy discharged then gave one last death rattle. If the audience had been disturbed by this violent display then they were positively distressed when the man reached into her exposed chest cavity and with the

knife, deftly removed lengths of cabling, coolant tubes and her main capacitor. Placing these along side her lifeless body, the man wiped the knife on her petticoats and then placed it carefully back in his pocket. He stood up and moved away, standing silently but demonstrating, Dick felt, the tell-tale look of someone who'd just eviscerated a mechanical prostitute. The stunned audience remained frozen in their seats. Surprisingly, it was the monocle man who broke the silence first. He did this by standing up and clapping. After a few seconds he was joined by a serious looking colleague towards the back of the auditorium who supplemented his clapping by shouting 'Bravo! Bravo!'.

The applause became as contagious as an outbreak of VD on the set of a cheap skin flick. Soon the entire audience were standing, well, except one or two of them who were so sticky from the oil that they were actually trapped in their seats. Vera smiled. Dick beamed. He drank in the adulation, vindicated that his proposal was a success. As the ovation died down and everyone became seated again, it was a senior Party member in the front row who spoke.

'Mr. Brunel and Dr. Hargreaves. Thank you for an impressive demonstration'.

Dick was about to respond but before he had the chance, the doctor had stood up and thanked the Party for their support, his colleagues for their assistance and Vera for her encouragement. The only person he didn't acknowledge was Dick. If Dick had previously taken a dislike to Dr. Hargreaves and his supercilious attitude, then he now absolutely loathed him. The senior Party member continued. 'We will of course be discussing the results in detail and presenting them to the Leader but I'm sure that I speak on behalf of my illustrious colleagues here that I am quietly confident that it will receive full backing and implementation as soon as possible'.

Cue more applause, shouts of 'Spiffing!', 'Well done, sir!' and other polite words of encouragement.

A small man in the middle of the audience spoke. 'One question though, Mr. Brunel. Is the degree of violence we have just witnessed, necessarily? Surely the mechanical man could just swiftly terminate the harlot with a single knife wound and then just walk discretely away so as not to attract unwelcome attention?'

Other members of the audience murmured in agreement.

'He could do that', Dick acknowledged, pleased that he was again the centre of attention. 'But the extremely violent nature of these attacks is sure to be reported in the media. While these attacks obviously won't discourage the mechanical harlots who will automatically obey their programming, they will act as a huge deterrent for any real women thinking of becoming prostitutes

themselves'. Dick added, 'Of course, the killer will replace the mechanical components removed from the victim's bodies with authentic-looking imitation human organs'.

The man who asked the question nodded and another serious looking man seated behind him spoke. 'This mysterious figure, this 'harlot hunter' you've created, I've never seen anything like him. He's not like any old Tom, Dick or Harry'.

The audience murmured in agreement. Dick walked over to the mechanical man still standing silently on the stage and put his hand on its shoulder.

'You're right', Dick agreed. 'He's special. He's not like any old Tom, Dick or Harry. His name is Jack'. He paused. 'Jack the Ripper. He was inspired by a historic figure I came across in my research. A figure from the original Victorian era… so you see there's a certain symmetry to his reappearance now'.

Another eruption of applause. The entire audience was again on its feet giving him an unprecedented level of vocal support. 'Fuck you, Dr. Hargreaves'. Dick thought, 'This is *my* show!' Dick walked to the front of the stage, his arms held out, basking in the adoration directed at him. If he'd known that the whole demonstration was being filmed and watched remotely he probably wouldn't have acted so over-confidently or so arrogantly. Many miles away the observer made notes about what had taken place and his thoughts about Dick. The last note written was 'cocksure'.

The Leader put his pen down and sat back to contemplate what he'd just seen.

CHAPTER 17

'How are you feeling?', enquired Vera as an old man hobbled painfully into the empty office early the next morning. The old man was actually Dick, except he wasn't actually an old man, he just acted like one. Slowly and painfully he lowered himself into his chair. He winced and he grimaced. He even flinched and cringed. His whole body ached; his bruised back was a fetching shade of black, purple and blue. His left shoulder was acutely painful – the result of it being popped into place after he dislocated it. Dick didn't know what made him leap off that stage into the audience. Well actually, he did. It was the whole buzz and knowledge that at that moment, all the spectators loved him. The problem was that none of the assembled Party members, scientists or technicians in this era understood the concept of crowd surfing.

Rather than catch Dick and propel him over their heads as he leapt off the stage, they panicked and performed an impromptu impersonation of the Red Sea. Dick remembered hurtling towards the unyielding floor and then, nothing. He'd been unconsciousness for about a minute before being revived and examined by a medical doctor in the audience who diagnosed the dislocated shoulder and kindly relocated it for him.

'I've just seen the official report,' Vera said, resting her hand on his shoulder.

Dick recoiled in agony.

'Sorry!', Vera exclaimed. She replaced her hand much more gently and gave Dick's shoulder a soft, almost sensuous, rub. An anxious Dick turned his head to look at her hand but in doing so cricked his neck, causing him yet more pain.

Vera spoke as she continued rubbing, 'The Party observers found your methods severe, yet satisfactory, and have made unconditional recommendations that Jack should be sent, 'into the field', as it were, to commence his work'.

Her caresses continued in gentle circles. 'I like brutality in a man', she said in her low voice. 'It's a very appealing trait…'

The rubbing was soothing and Dick gently closed his eyes, enjoying this temporary release from pain. He knew his solution was brutal. Taylor had told him that the Party was ruthless which is why he felt they would approve of his solution. The display was frightening in its violence but Dick didn't have any qualms about sending Jack out to perform his dirty deeds. These were only robots after all, robots that were being decommissioned, as Jack would be, after his work was done. Dick suddenly shook himself alert and opened his eyes. He saw

Vera a few inches from his face, staring into his eyes. In a reflex move he let out an involuntary scream and an equally shocked and alarmed Vera screamed back.

Dick's dislocated shoulder turned out to be a good cover for his protracted absence from work. In addition to wincing whenever he twisted or turned in an awkward way, Dick spent the rest of the day going about his normal duties; drafting reports, poring over statistics and analysing research findings. Project Gladstone was still very much under cover and as far as Dick was aware, no one in the department knew anything about it apart from Vera. She'd left early for a meeting and the office was empty apart from Dick who was just finishing his work for the evening, and Benjamin who sidled up to him.

'I'm glad you're back at work Jeremy. I'm pleased you're recovering', he said. 'What exactly happened?'

Dick gulped. A gulp which said, if it was at all possible to interpret gulps, 'Fuck. I've just realised I never checked with Vera about the cover story for my illness and my time off'. 'Er, I fell over at home', Dick said rather unconvincingly. 'Clumsy accident really. I slipped getting out of the shower and dislocated my shoulder'.

'Dislocated it, eh?' Benjamin gave him the sort of look that indicated he didn't think this was a serious enough injury to warrant two weeks away from work.

'Yes. Dislocated it and also fractured it. In eight places. Cracks everywhere. Terrible mess, terrible. Lucky I still have use of my arm. And my shoulder'. Dick switched off his computer terminal. He wanted to leave before Benjamin asked any more tricky questions. Unfortunately he was too late.

'Really?', said Benjamin. 'We were told you were ill in hospital'.

'I was', Dick said, completely and utterly forgetting that this had been part of the cover story. 'There were, er, complications'.

'Such as', Benjamin enquired.

'Pardon?', said Dick anxiously, playing for time.

'What sort of complications were there?', pressed Benjamin.

'Pardon?', said Dick again, playing for more time.

'What complications occurred?'. Benjamin wouldn't let this go.

Dick said the first thing that came into his head and for once, it was quite a good first thing, 'I got an infection from the fracture and it caused problems'. He pointed to his lap and whispered, 'Down there'. Benjamin raised an eyebrow. Dick knew he had to say something about his condition that would put an end to Benjamin's prying and this meant something so personal and so unpleasant that no one would want to say something like, 'Let's have a look, then'.

'I got acute blood poisoning of my testicles', Dick explained. 'They swelled up like footballs and secreted a thick greenish crispy pus out

of my scrotum that smelled of vinegar and stilton. It was awful Benjamin. Just awful! It's still weeping a bit now'.

'I see'. Benjamin's tone indicate he didn't believe a word of anything Dick had just said but his expression implied he certainly wasn't going to call his bluff and ask him to verify it. 'I'm sorry to hear that. Anyway…', he added, 'Congratulations!'

'On my recovery?', Dick enquired, as he attempted to find a pain-free way of putting on his jacket.

Benjamin sidled even closer to Dick and lowered his voice. 'No. On your recent demonstration. I hear it was quite a success'.

Dick frowned as Benjamin continued, 'News travels fast, especially, if like me, you've got a close relative in the Party'. He looked at Dick more intently. 'Yes, that's right Dick. You're not the only person to have this sort of association. It seems your solution to Project Gladstone has been highly regarded.'

'Glad-what?', asked Dick, this time frowning more severely to try and elicit the right degree of surprise.

'I know all about it!', exclaimed Benjamin, with more than a trace of annoyance in his voice. 'And I know a lot more, too'.

Dick gulped as Benjamin continued.

'I've used my connections and I've been digging. Believe me, I've dug deep, really deep. Subterranean almost. You know what's really odd? Despite what you told me, I can't find any trace of you having a relative in the Party. None whatsoever'. Benjamin's voice was now raised. 'I thought if you've lied about this, what else have you lied about? The annoying thing is that your personal record checks out. It even confirms you were hospitalised last week. But I'm certain you are not who or what you seem and I'm determined to get to the bottom of it'.

Dick shrugged his shoulders and after wincing again from the sharp pain that shot up his back, immediately wished he hadn't.

What Benjamin said next came out sounding like a threat. Not the sort of threat like 'Unless you give me the map to the hidden treasure I will introduce you to Mister Pliers and his companion Señor Red Hot Poker', but a more subtle form of intimidation.

'The Party obviously values your successful solution but I know something they will value even more'.

What Benjamin said next filled Dick with dread.

'The unmasking of an impostor in their midst'. Benjamin leant close to Dick and narrowed his eyes. 'Need I say more?'

Dick knew Benjamin didn't need to. He'd said enough. More than enough in fact. On a scale of one to ten, if 'enough' was five, then Benjamin had said thirty-two. Dick was very worried. There was no knowing how high in the Party Benjamin's connections were or even

what resources he had at his own disposal. Working alongside an annoying prick of a work colleague was one thing; he could tolerate that. Working alongside an annoying, jealous, interfering, suspicious, distrustful prick with access to his records, who was determined to reveal Dick's real identity was another.

Benjamin doffed his hat and began to walk out. Pausing in the doorway, he turned to face Dick, 'Have a good evening Jeremy'. He turned back round and walked out. Without breaking his stride Benjamin nonchalantly added, 'If that is, in fact, your real name… '.

And with that, he was gone.

- - o O o - -

The next day, things had returned to normal. Well, as normal as they could be, considering that your co-worker had threatened to reveal your most deeply kept secret which would inevitably result in cruel and unusual punishments and your eventual death. Benjamin never referred to this recent conversation and went about his business as usual. He met in private with Vera once more; Dick hoped this was part of Benjamin's new campaign to persuade her of his abilities and not part of his campaign to unmask him. Or maybe it was both — that way he would be extremely well-positioned to assume a senior role. Dick tried to immerse himself again in the various National Hat Week tasks but found it very hard to concentrate. After working on Project Gladstone he found the whole hat project as unstimulating as a hotel pay-per-view 'adult' movie channel. While Dick pushed paper around his desk, Jack was being fine-tuned and undergoing last-minute checks from the technicians. There was nothing more for Dick to do.

He felt a bit resentful that all progress on the project was being communicated directly to Vera, and that, for the time being, he was well and truly out of the loop. He was slightly aggrieved that no one from the Party had thanked him directly, but wasn't sure if his expectations had been too high. Dick appreciated that his previous thoughts of a ticker-tape parade were unrealistic but still hoped his achievements would be sufficient enough to bring him to the attention of the Party hierarchy. Of course, this assumed that his solution to Project Gladstone would be a total success. What would happen if Jack too, went rogue? Or worse. What if he caught fire, or his head exploded or he started attacking real flesh and blood women like his infamous namesake? This was all completely out of Dick's control and this made him frustrated in addition to resentful. Even with his limited knowledge of the Party, Dick knew that a consequence of Jack failing would be his own falling out of favour. Because of this alone,

Jack *had* to work. This was his one shot to infiltrate the Party; to use one of the taglines Dick had devised in his previous career for a RomCom about dental technicians, 'You don't get a second chance to make a first impression'.

While Dick continued to worry about Jack's mission, a great drama was unfolding in the entrance lobby at the Ministry of Information which, if Dick had known about it, would have caused him even greater anxiety. Stationed there were a team of two security guards, one of whom was Frank, a pock-marked, unattractive, heavy-set man who suffered from a birth defect; an extra Stupid chromosome. While pleasant enough, or as pleasant as anyone working in a security role can be, Frank was particularly dim. He'd been hired for his bulk not for his brain on the basis that a criminal element would probably try and force their way past him, rather than force him to enter into a discussion about Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and existential despair. Frank was the type of security guard, who, if finding a fountain pen on the floor would pick it up, look at it and think, 'Hmmm. A fountain pen', and put it into the lost property container that was kept behind the reception desk.

Unfortunately for Dick, it wasn't Frank who found the fountain pen, it was his cynical colleague Charles. Charles was a weasely-looking man, as thin as he was suspicious. Charles never accepted anything at face value. If he saw something that looked like a duck and quacked like a duck, he would automatically assume that it was a goose in disguise. And so it was with the fountain pen. That's not to say he thought the pen was a goose in disguise (that would have just been ridiculous), but he assumed it was something else. Of course, he was right. Charles saw the pen lying on the floor next to a stone column on the far side of the reception. He walked over, picked it up and examined it in detail. It was a nice fountain pen. The barrel was polished tortoiseshell. It was finely balanced with a gold-plated nib and clasp. He unscrewed the nib assembly, looked inside, frowned, peered more intently at it, frowned some more, then disappeared into the security office.

Later that day Dick was still worrying about Jack going wrong when he heard the officious announcement over the tannoy asking if anyone had lost a fountain pen. Dick thought it was odd to make an announcement about such a petty issue but assumed that's what usually happened. Maybe the Ministry of Information was a caring, sharing sort of organisation that was always trying to reunite its staff with mislaid items. Then he panicked and felt his inside jacket pocket. Had he lost *his* pen? The pen with the homing device given to him by Taylor? Worry turned to fear then turned to calm. Dick breathed a sigh of relief when he felt the familiar pen-like bulge.

Elsewhere in the office his male colleagues were also checking pockets, desk pen holders or briefcases, shrugging their shoulders and continuing with their work. Dick relaxed and reverted to typing letters to members of the Beret Makers Guild. If the only thing Dick had to do was type this correspondence, he would have been fine. Well, not fine, he would have still been in an unbelievable amount of trouble — it's just that it would have been a while longer before he was aware of it. It was when he came to sign the letters that Dick was alerted to the pending danger. Reaching into his jacket pocket again Dick pulled out his fountain pen and unscrewed the cap. This wasn't as straightforward as he imagined because cigars don't have caps. That was the point at which Dick remembered he'd bought a cigar the day before, tucking it in his jacket pocket for safe-keeping. What he didn't remember was losing the fountain pen he usually kept there. *That* fountain pen.

Of course, there was a chance that whoever had found the pen hadn't attempted to examine it in detail. The electronics had been well concealed to avoid detection by anyone other than the most determined, curious and meddlesome person. It worked exactly as a real fountain pen so there was no reason to expect it would be anything else. Unless you were Charles the security guard. Dick gulped and assessed his next course of action. This was easy. The first thing he had to do was to find another pen to sign his letters. The second was to keep very, very, very quiet about his loss.

CHAPTER 18

Dick was in the library later that day when Vera again accosted him. In recent days their relationship had changed. This hadn't been, to his huge relief, in any sexual predatory way, but in how she treated him. Vera was still the boss but he had gone from being just an employee to being an employee slash confidante. Dick liked this new dynamic as it gave him small but valuable insights into the Party, but he was also conscious of the fact that the small whispered conversations in the office or corridors infuriated Benjamin. Not that Benjamin ever mentioned this, but Dick could see it in his face.

Benjamin was one of those people who obviously found it hard to conceal their emotions. Whenever he saw Dick and Vera talking, he looked like a man who'd seen Dick naked in a locker room; an expression of equal parts astonishment, jealously and anger. Before recent events, Dick had taken great satisfaction in riling Benjamin but given Benjamin's threat to unmask him, he was now keen not to provoke him. Which is why he was glad Vera was sharing her confidences here in private.

'Be on your guard', she whispered in her low-but-definitely-not-sexy voice. 'There is an infiltrator among us!'.

Dick dropped the book he was holding. It was quite a large book and the noise made a few library users look in his direction and frown, and a few others make a 'shushing' sound. This 'shushing' sound made a few other users turn and tut. The tutting in turn, caused others to glare and whisper 'Be quiet!', though not as quietly as some would have liked. After the shushing, tutting and 'be quiet!'s had died down, Dick picked up his book and Vera continued.

'You know that pen that was reported lost?', she asked. Dick nodded.

'Well it wasn't just an ordinary fountain pen!'

'I know', Dick said, immediately wishing he hadn't.

'What do you mean?', Vera enquired.

Dick responded with as much sincerity as he could muster, which to be frank, wasn't that much at all. 'Well, I, er, well that's to say, I erm thought that no one would make an announcement about a lost pen unless there was something unusual about it'.

Vera nodded. 'That's very astute of you. Good thinking, Mr. Brunel'. Continuing in her low voice Vera added, 'I've just heard that it was packed full of electronics and probably some sort of signalling device. There's a very high likelihood that it belongs to a member of the resistance movement, someone who could well be working among us in this very building!'

Dick meant to say ‘No!’ with the appropriate degree of disbelief and innocent surprise but he was so worried by what Vera had just revealed that he said ‘Noooooooooo!’ quite loudly, the way you’d say it in slow motion in the movies as you threw yourself across a room trying to catch a fragile object as it plummets towards the floor. This time everyone in the library began shushing, tutting and yelling ‘be quiet!’ so Vera and Dick had to leave. In the elevator going back down to the office Vera told him that the Party were treating this issue with the utmost seriousness. This was a Code 2B alert; everyone in the building was considered a suspect.

‘Everyone? Even you?’, Dick asked, mopping his brow which had begun to perspire.

‘Yes. Even me. And even you!’.

Dick looked shocked and worried — mainly because he was.

Vera continued. ‘I know it’s preposterous to think that either of us are implicated in some way but nothing like this has ever happened before. The Party are extremely concerned at this breach in security. Frankly it’s beyond belief that it could have even happened’.

‘How will they find out who the pen belongs too?’ Dick asked, perspiring a little bit more.

‘Well, that’s the problem’, Vera explained. ‘They’ve already carried out stage one, a forensic examination. The pen was handled extensively by a security guard so it can’t be checked for fingerprints. It also looks like it had never been used and that means no one would have ink residue on their skin’.

‘So trying to trace the owner is going to be pretty much impossible?’, asked Dick optimistically.

‘Impossible? The Party doesn’t recognise the word ‘impossible’. They’ll just implement stage two of the investigation’.

The elevator stopped with a slight jolt and the door opened.

‘Stage two?’, Dick asked.

‘Yes’, Vera added. ‘Interrogating every single person in the building’.

Dick let out a slight fart but the sound of the elevator door closing with a dull ‘clang’ masked it.

‘Don’t be concerned’, Vera added cheerily as she strode towards the office. The interrogation will be but a minor inconvenience for people like us. You’ll have nothing to worry about’.

As they entered the office Vera turned to Dick and smiled, the smile of someone who has absolutely nothing to worry about. Dick returned the smile with slightly less confidence.

- - o O o - -

The next meeting at the Resistance headquarters had been well-timed. Or badly-timed, given the circumstances. It had been pre-arranged for a while and Dick had been collected by Edward that evening after work.

Dick sat in the middle of the lounge, the centre of attention. He leaned back in a comfortable chair, debriefing his colleagues on Project Gladstone and Benjamin's recent veiled threats against him. Dick gave a full account of Jack from the initial acceptance of his proposal, the successful demonstration and the impending start of his mission. Taylor and Humphrey listened extra intently while Dick recounted his time at the Scientific Research Centre in case it gave any clues to the so-called secret weapon. As Dick spoke he could see his audience hanging on his every word. He was respected. Even revered. Grace, who was sitting at the back, even winked and pouted at him. Everything was going so well until he finished reporting on Jack and mentioned, almost in passing, the mislaid pen. Taylor frowned slightly and suggested that he and Dick retire to a private room to continue their discussion. Once behind closed doors Taylor's demeanour changed and that's when Dick understood the meaning of the word 'apoplectic'.

'You lost it! You lost it! What do you mean you bloody lost it?! How could you be so damn stupid? This can compromise the mission and us! You're a bloody idiot, Dick! A bloody idiot pure and simple! How difficult is it not to lose a pen? All of our members have similar signalling devices and not one of them has lost them, nor even misplaced them for a short while! I've never met someone so utterly careless, cavalier or irresponsible!'

Dick had never seen Taylor angry like this. He wasn't so much like a bear with a sore head as a bear with a sore head who'd accidentally caught his testicles in a rusty bear trap. Even though Taylor was enraged, his temper was tempered by the fact that in this polite New Victorian society strong expletives were limited to 'damn, ' bloody', 'hell', 'hellfire', 'bastard', 'piss' and 'bugger'. That's the reason Taylor didn't call Dick a 'motherfucking cocksucker' even though he rightfully deserved this description.

Taylor continued ranting and every time Dick tried to apologise, he was just shouted down. After what seemed like ages (and in fact it was), Dick became aware of the refreshing sound of silence. Taylor had stopped shouting and was now staring at him, the stare you give an idiot or a young child while waiting for them to answer you.

'Calm down', Dick said, not very helpfully. Then, even more unhelpfully he added, 'No one's died'.

'No, but you might, if the bloody pen is traced back to you!', Taylor exclaimed. 'And we're all in jeopardy if the security checks

make any sort of connection between us!'.

'It's not as if I had my initials monogrammed on to it, is it?' Dick replied with a degree of sarcasm. 'Or it carried a sticker that says, 'If found please return to Jeremy Brunel'. How on earth will they know it's mine?'

'By interrogation, that's how', Taylor shouted.

'Oh yes…' Dick said quietly, remembering what Vera had told him.

After several long breaths and a slow count to twenty, Taylor was much calmer. The threat from Benjamin was serious enough but now the whole pen issue threatened to expose Dick and wipe out all of his successes to date. Now the prime short-term objective was to ensure Dick avoided detection in the interrogation which, Taylor told him, might involve a libido test in addition to being hooked up to a lie detector.

'Why a libido test?' asked Dick.

'It's the easiest test to do', Taylor explained. 'Show the suspect various erotic images and check changes in their blood pressure and body temperature. The monthly injections would normally suppress the body's natural reactions'.

'So reacting in a certain way means you're avoiding the injections, and that indicates to the Party that you're subversive?', asked Dick.

'Not necessarily', explained Taylor. 'It could mean you're avoiding the injections or it could just indicate that the chemicals aren't working. Either way though, it means there is cause for concern and a cue to investigate further'.

'Can you help me pass these tests?', asked Dick nervously.

'I can't give you a cast iron guarantee that you'll pass', said Taylor, 'But we have methods that can greatly improve your chances'.

Taylor left the room but returned a short time later with a small fabric bag. From this he removed some yellow and red pills, a syringe and a bottle of colourless liquid. As Dick saw the syringe carefully being filled he rolled up his shirt sleeve and tensed his forearm. After dabbing a vein with an antiseptic sponge, Taylor gave Dick an injection.

'That will help to negate any truth serum', Taylor said, withdrawing the needle and placing a small sticking plaster over the puncture wound. 'Take the two yellow pills tonight and the two red ones just before the test. They are very fast acting and work in conjunction with the injection'.

'So I'll be able to beat the lie detector?', Dick asked with almost a pleading look in his eye.

'You should be all right'.

‘Should be? That’s not very reassuring’, Dick commented.

‘Whether you pass or not ultimately depends on your will power’, Taylor explained. ‘And I can’t influence that’. He added, ‘As long as you convince yourself that you’re absolutely and completely innocent, you should pass’.

Dick heard that ‘should’ word again and didn’t like it. He took comfort however in the fact that you couldn’t be a world-famous porn star without being able to control your climax and if anything was a measure of will power, then that was it.

‘And what about the libido test?’ Dick asked, rolling his sleeve back down.

‘We can deal with this by another method’, said Taylor, rummaging in his bag again and removing an elasticated headband containing various sensors that was connected to a control device by two cables. The whole contraption was hooked up to some sort of small battery pack.

‘Stand up’, Taylor said.

Dick obliged and Taylor carefully placed the headband on Dick so that it sat just above his eyes. He unravelled the wires to the controller and stood in front of Dick.

‘You know how strong my libido is?’, asked Dick. ‘Are you sure this device will be able to suppress it?’

‘Temporarily, yes. The effect should last a couple of days’. Taylor clicked a switch and turned a dial on the controller. ‘Now, close your eyes tight. You’ll feel a short, sharp sensation’.

Dick closed his eyes as requested.

A second later he was doubled-up in pain. No, not pain. Agony. More agony than slamming your fingers in a car door. More agony than slamming your penis in car door — although why you might have your penis in close proximity to an open car door is anyone’s guess. Dick felt like he’d been kneed in the groin, which was precisely what had just happened. Taylor had done it with so much force that Dick felt that his testicles had re-ascended and were now introducing themselves to his tonsils. He collapsed to the ground, alternately screaming in pain and shouting insults at Taylor in a falsetto. After twitching and writhing on the ground like an epileptic fish thrown on to dry land Dick managed to compose himself and state the obvious.

‘You kneed me in the fucking balls!’, he groaned to Taylor through watering eyes. ‘What about the device. Why didn’t you use it?!’

‘This?’, asked Taylor, crouching down and removing the electrodes from Dick’s head. ‘This doesn’t do anything’.

Dick looked confused. In a horrendous amount of pain and confused. He groaned again.

‘But I thought it would control my libido so I’d pass the test?’

‘No. That’s what the knee in your balls was for’, Taylor said nonchalantly. ‘The device was just to distract you so I could get a clear aim’.

Dick looked even more confused.

‘Tests have shown that the most effective way to reduce your libido for 48 hours is a good old fashioned knee in the testicles. But I couldn’t very well expect you to stand perfectly still while I did it, could I?’

Dick had to agree that he could not. Taylor helped Dick up to his feet and removed a small ice pack from the bag to make him more comfortable.

‘You’ll be fine’, Taylor told him. ‘I’m sure the bruising will subside after a few days’. Packing up his bag Taylor opened the door and Edward entered.

‘Edward will take you back home’. Shaking Dick’s hand Taylor looked Dick straight in the eyes. ‘Good luck with the lie detector’.

‘And the libido test’, Dick groaned.

‘Oh that’, said Taylor, ‘I made that bit up’. With that, he gave what Dick was sure was a wry smile and left the room.

Dick travelled back to his apartment in silence, the welcome ice pack resting on his lap. Taylor was a sly bastard, he thought. A sly fucking bastard. As per the previous arrangements, Edward dropped Dick off a few blocks from his home. The streets were deserted at this time of night. There was no one to see a man with a pained expression slowly walking along the pavements, wincing from his bruised testicles every time he took a step. No one except a lone figure waiting in the shadows opposite Elm Grove Tower West.

Dick opened the door to the lobby, glanced around into the night, and then walked in. He hobbled slowly towards the elevator that would take him to his apartment. Only when the elevator doors had closed did Benjamin decide to step out of the shadows and begin his own way home.

CHAPTER 19

The next day it was announced that all of Vera's department would have to attend an 'interview' on the 28th floor. There were two main rumours flying around the department. The first was that the suspect had already been identified and apprehended and that these 'interviews' were just routine and no one had anything at all to worry about. The second rumour was that the suspect had not been caught and that as the employees in Dick's department were the last to be interviewed they had a lot to worry about. There was also a third rumour, that the suspect had been caught but had then escaped by miniaturising himself to a height of just half an inch then scuttling into an air vent to safety. To be fair though, not many people believed this particular rumour. Dick was standing at the water fountain and after making sure no one was looking, popped the two red pills in his mouth and took a sip of water.

'Nervous?' Benjamin's sudden appearance caused Dick to gulp in surprise, half choking on the water but swallowing the pills in the process.

'No', Dick answered, trying to muster as much confidence as he could manage. Of course he was nervous. In fact he couldn't recall a time when he had been more nervous. Not even when there had been an outbreak of Herpes Simplex type 2 while filming 'Sperms of Endearment'.

'Why should I be nervous?' Dick enquired, nervously.

'No reason', said Benjamin taking a mouthful of water himself. 'Unless, of course, you have something to hide'.

'Me?' Dick gave a small, anxious laugh. 'I hope they catch the person who owned that fountain pen and torture him. Bloody traitor!'

'How do you know it's a 'him'?' Benjamin enquired.

'I don't. It's just a figure of speech'.

'I see. Like 'fountain pen'?' continued Benjamin.

Dick stared at him. He had no idea what Benjamin was talking about. Benjamin noticed his expression of surprise and continued.

'You said 'fountain pen'',

'So?', asked Dick, still confused.

'How do you know it was a fountain pen?'

Dick was beginning to sweat and splashed some water on to his face, partly to cool him down and partly to give him time to think. 'When they made the announcement on the loudspeaker they asked if anyone had lost a fountain pen'. Dick was certain that's what was said.

'Are you sure?' Benjamin moved closer to Dick, looking him straight in the eyes. 'I thought they just said it was a black pen'.

‘No. It was tortoiseshell’.

This was the moment when Dick realised that he had said more than he had wanted to and definitely more than he should. He’d fallen straight into that trap. He knew the announcement had mentioned a fountain pen. Benjamin had been trying to confuse him. What the announcement had failed to give was the pen’s colour. Benjamin didn’t say anything. He didn’t need to; he just walked away smiling. Dick wondered what his next course of action should be but before he could even think of a plan, let alone put it into effect, he heard his name being called.

‘Attention Jeremy Brunel, Jeremy Brunel. Will Jeremy Brunel please make his way to the 28th floor’.

The emotionless, siren-like call of the tannoy was announcing that his time was well and truly up. They were calling all employees in the department in surname alphabetical order so Dick was one of the first to be seen. With a heavy heart and aching testicles Dick ascended to the nominated floor where he was directed to a small office. He hesitated outside the room then cautiously pushed the door open. Inside, another stern-looking Party official greeted him. Actually, ‘greeted’ was the wrong word as it implies some degree of affability. All this man did was glare at Dick and indicate an uncomfortable-looking chair on the other side of a table. This table was bare except for a lamp and what looked like a large recording device which Dick assumed was the lie-detector. Oh yes, there was also a polished stainless steel tray containing a large syringe.

Dick gulped twice, then once more, and sat down in what was probably the most uncomfortable chair he had ever experienced. It was too low, too hard and the angle of the back was totally wrong. It was being used, Dick assumed, to unnerve him and had obviously been supplied by the company that manufactures seating for fast food restaurants; designed to be so uncomfortable that you would only spend ten minutes seated, thus improving customer throughput (as they say in the fast food restaurant business).

The Party official sat facing him on a far more comfortable chair and Dick immediately felt a twinge of jealousy. The official attached sensors from the lie-detector to Dick’s temples, clicked a couple of switches and adjusted a dial or two. With the recent successful trials of Jack still fresh in his mind Dick had another urge to shout out, ‘Do you know who you’re interrogating?’, but thought better of it.

Dick had two rules about confronting people. The first was never have an argument with someone with a megaphone. The other was never talk back to someone pointing a large syringe at you. This was precisely what the Party official was doing and moments later Dick received a stinging injection in his forearm. As if this wasn’t

uncomfortable enough the official then switched on the extremely bright desk lamp and shone it directly into Dick's face. Dick hoped that the lie detector could discriminate between perspiration brought on by the heat of the lamp and the sweat of guilt. The glare of the lamp's intense white light meant that Dick could no longer see the face of his interrogator and this unnerved him even more.

Taylor was right about the libido test. There wasn't one. Instead Dick was asked to confirm his identity and various personal details. Throughout, the lie detector steadily hummed while a pointer scribbled its damning verdict on a slowly-rotating paper roll. Dick was answering questions about his employment history when he heard the door open. Someone else entered the room and sat down facing him; the intense light also rendering them invisible. They remained silent, seemingly there to observe the interrogation. After a few minutes they spoke. It was a female voice that took over the questioning.

'Have you seen this pen before Mr. Brunel?'.

The woman placed a tortoiseshell fountain pen down on the table in front of him. Dick looked down and rubbed the brightness from his eyes so he could see the pen.

'No'.

'Pick it up. Examine it. You need to be one hundred per cent sure that you have never set eyes on this pen before'. The female voice was harsh and accusatory in tone. Dick picked up the pen and looked at it, trying to do his best impression of someone who hadn't seen this pen before. He put it down, shrugged his shoulders and gave it a suitable look of disdain.

'No. I've never seen it before'.

The lie detector continued to hum and the pointer on the recording device continued to scribble. Dick continued to perspire. He hoped to god that the injection and pills given to him by Taylor were working.

'Are you, or have you ever been, a member of the Resistance Movement?'.

The directness of this question unnerved Dick.

'No. Never'.

This time he thought he heard the pointer scribble a bit more energetically. The woman sat back in her chair but her face still remained obscured by the lamp's glare. Dick had been taken aback by her forthright nature, but wasn't prepared for the directness of her next question.

'We've been told categorically by someone working here that you are, and that the pen belongs to you'.

'That's a lie!' Dick reacted violently to this accusation and thumped his fist on the table. The shock made the pointer leap right

across the paper. ‘Shit!’ Dick thought. He hoped this outburst and the effect on the read-out wouldn’t condemn him. ‘Who told you that?’. Before the man or woman had a chance to respond Dick answered his own question. ‘It was Benjamin, wasn’t it?’

No response. Just the continued bright light and the constant hum of the lie-detector.

‘He’s trying to incriminate me! He’s jealous of my success with Project Gladstone and wants to see me fail!’

Still no reaction from his interrogators, but the pointer continued to scribble furiously.

‘He’s a lying bastard! Benjamin’s trying to frame me!’

The woman spoke. ‘Thank you Mr. Brunel. That will be all’. Dick heard her get up. ‘For now’. Switches clicked. The hum ceased and the light was extinguished.

Dick rubbed his eyes. After they had readjusted to the ambient light he saw he was alone in the room with the Party official, his mysterious female interrogator and the pen long gone. The sensors were removed and Dick sloped back to his desk, confused over what had just taken place. If the Party believed Benjamin’s allegations then why weren’t they acting on them? Why hadn’t Dick been arrested? Was this all part of their game? Would they let him think he was innocent but in reality, keep him under surveillance, watching his every step in the hope he’d lead them to Taylor and the resistance HQ? More worriedly, Dick thought that after this interrogation Taylor might feel that Dick was now too much of a liability to continue in his mission and would cease any further contact. This would mean Dick would be totally on his own, with no support or back-up and more importantly, no continued antidote to the monthly sexual suppression injections. As Dick waited for the elevator he smashed his fist against the wall. Damn Benjamin! Fuck shit damn piss hell!

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Dick found it hard to concentrate on his work after he returned to his desk. At regular intervals the tannoy called his colleagues to the 28th floor. All of them left the office with looks of trepidation but all returned with expressions of relief. Well they would, wouldn’t they, thought Dick. They had absolutely nothing to fear, not even fear itself. Dick had heard that expression somewhere before but wasn’t sure what it meant however before he had time to mull it over, Benjamin walked back into the offices with more than a look of relief on his face. He was actually smiling. Dick wanted to leap up and pummel his head into a soft pulpy mess but resisted and smiled back, wondering

what further damning allegations Benjamin had made to his interrogators.

Given his actual guilt and uncharacteristic outbursts earlier, Dick wouldn't have been at all surprised if he'd been called back for further questioning. And this, in fact, is exactly what happened at half past five. At first Dick didn't realise his name was being called. Then a colleague nudged him. Vera looked up from her desk and frowned. Benjamin just grinned. Dick got up and with an air of resignation, left the room. Perhaps the lie detector had malfunctioned and he was being recalled to undergo the questioning again. Or perhaps it had functioned perfectly and he was going to be told the results he dreaded. This, he feared, was more likely. Dick thought about making a run for it, but where to? The Party knew where he lived and he had no other place of refuge. He wouldn't be able to live long outside of the system without being recognised or tracked down. He had no allies except for those in the Resistance and their secrecy meant he couldn't even contact them. Of course, if he hadn't lost his fountain pen he would have been able to send them a distress signal. Of course, if he hadn't lost his fountain pen then he wouldn't have been in this predicament in the first place, and so wouldn't need rescuing.

Dick reached the 28th floor and it was on re-entering the interrogation room that he had his first shock. Sitting facing him was his neighbour Mary. It was when she spoke that Dick realised her voice was the voice of the female interrogator, the one who remained hidden behind the glare of the lamp. Dick knew the voice questioning him had sounded familiar but he'd been too anxious to make any sort of connection.

'Sit down, please Mr. Brunel'.

'So you're not a doctor?', Dick asked.

'I am', Mary replied. 'A doctor of criminal psychology. I'm employed by the Party and one of my duties is overseeing interrogations'.

Neighbour or not, there was absolutely no familiarity about her tone. She was here in her official Party capacity with a job to do. A job to condemn him to a horrible fate.

'You won't be surprised to hear that following the interrogations of all the staff working here, we have identified the traitor'.

Dick farted.

Ignoring this, Mary continued. 'It's someone who managed to conceal his true identity and hoodwink his employers and the Party'.

Another fart. This one longer.

'The curious thing is, he passed the lie detector test. We can only assume that he did this by means of a temporary chemical suppressant…'

Mary was interrupted by the door bursting open. Dick turned to face two armed guards. They stared at him, guns raised. In a complete reflex action Dick raised his hands high above his head.

'Come with me', she ordered.

Dick went to get up.

'No, you stay here Mr. Brunel'.

Mary left the room with the guards in tow. He could hear her talking to them outside the room, then heard the sound of their heavy boots pounding the corridor.

Mary re-entered. 'Where was I? Oh yes. The traitor thought he had avoided detection and even tried to blame one of his colleagues in an effort to disguise his guilt'.

Dick was stunned. In fact stunned doesn't go anywhere near to describe how he felt. He was amazed, astonished and astounded all at the same time. In his state of shock he managed to get one word out. Fortunately this was a relevant word. It wasn't something random like xylophone, giraffe or bungalow. It was the word 'Benjamin?'

Mary nodded. 'It seems Mr. Faraday was not what he appeared'.

Dick managed to get one other word out. 'Wow!'.

'We were certain there was a member of the Resistance operating within the department but despite our keen surveillance they somehow managed to evade us. Until now, that is'. Mary leaned forward slightly and continued, adopting a more earnest tone. 'As you know, Benjamin tried to implicate you and I wanted to bring you here to apologise for treating you as a suspect. The party is well aware of the work you have undertaken for Project Gladstone and I of course know you on a personal level. Of course, I didn't believe Benjamin's outlandish allegations but I hope you understand that everyone had to be interrogated in exactly the same way'.

Dick nodded with a slightly blank look, trying to deal with the simultaneous mixed emotions of relief and shock. Relief that Taylor's drugs had worked but shock that Benjamin *had* been a member of Resistance all along.

'Are you one hundred per cent certain that Benjamin's guilty?' Dick added, hoping that he wasn't pushing his luck, and that Mary wouldn't say something like, 'Hmmmmm. Maybe we were too hasty and got it all wrong'. But she didn't.

'Definitely. Although he passed the lie detector, we were alerted to his guilt by something far more serious'.

Dick's frown was a cue for Mary to continue.

'We received an anonymous tip-off and while Benjamin was being interrogated, a search was conducted of his work station. Concealed in a locked drawer we found a copy of your recommendations for Project Gladstone and even more damning, plans to build improvised

explosive devices and a list of Party targets'.

Dick's mind was reeling. His earlier hunch about Benjamin being recruited by Taylor as a back-up was right. If Benjamin was clever in disguising his anti-Party role then Taylor was a genius. A devious genius. He must have known that one of them would be unmasked in the interrogations so he hedged his bets. It obviously didn't matter which one of them was sacrificed, Dick or Benjamin. Who cared as long as one of them continued the fight against the Party? Before he had time to consider the implications of Taylor's cunning strategy Mary stood up.

'You are free to go now Mr. Brunel'.

'What about Benjamin?' Dick enquired, also standing.

'He'll be taken to the State Police Headquarters for further interrogation'.

'And then what?' Dick enquired.

'You don't need to concern yourself with his fate, Mr. Brunel'. Mary held the door open for him. 'Goodbye'.

Dick hesitated as he left the room. He stopped and shook his head. 'I didn't suspect Benjamin'.

Mary continued to hold the door open, now slightly annoyed that Dick hadn't actually left yet, as despite its appearance, it was quite a heavy door. 'No one suspected him, Mr. Brunel, no one at all. Which just goes to show that many people are in fact, not whom they might seem'.

As Dick left the room he took one last look at Mary to see if he could detect whether this barbed remark was aimed at him. Was it the sort of remark that, if you read between the lines, meant 'I'm talking about you Jeremy Brunel. We know you're concealing something and we're watching you like a hawk'. If Mary was making a veiled threat to Dick then she certainly didn't make it obvious. She didn't raise an eyebrow by the tiniest amount or give a half smile. She didn't even simultaneously wink and stamp her foot. Totally inscrutable, she gave absolutely nothing away. But then, just as Dick passed by her she uttered something under her breath that made him shudder.

'William has a new jigsaw. The changing of the guard at Buckingham Palace. Two thousand pieces including lots of blue sky… Drop in anytime…'

CHAPTER 20

Jack had been activated at the Party HQ and sent on his mission into London's East End. His programming was simple. He would move from bar to pub to tavern looking handsome, prosperous and a little bit lonely, attributes that the rogue prostitutes had been programmed to respond to. In less than twenty-four hours he had met his first target.

Jack was reading a newspaper and sipping a glass of port (he was designed to chemically digest anything he drank or ate) in the Smiling Blacksmith pub just off the Whitechapel Road when a woman approached. She was reasonably attractive, quite well dressed and she asked if the seat opposite was taken. Jack, always the gentleman, doffed his hat and said that he would welcome her company. Soon they were chatting about current affairs, the price of drinks and the latest bridge construction. Jack discovered her name was Elizabeth and it wasn't long before Jack bought her a large glass of red wine. It wasn't long after that before Elizabeth leant forward and whispered something suggestive in his ear. Jack nodded and smiled, then whispered back. More softly spoken words were exchanged, then Elizabeth blushed. She pulled back to look at Jack who was winking, holding his hands about ten inches apart (needless to say, Dick had insisted on that part of the programming).

Jack paid for the drinks, picked up his briefcase and the new couple exited the pub. Elizabeth looked nervously about her and taking Jack by the hand, led him up a dimly-lit Brick Lane towards Shoreditch. Noticing a police patrol on the corner of Hanbury Street they doubled back and after a few minutes, reached a deserted and squalid alleyway near Spitalfields Market. Making sure they were concealed from anyone who might pass by the alley entrance, Elizabeth grabbed Jack's head with one hand, pulled him towards her and kissed him passionately on the lips. Her other hand moved skilfully down between his legs and felt the rock hard bulge in his trousers (his pneumatic valves were operating faultlessly). Elizabeth gasped. After releasing him she leant against one of the walls and began undressing. Despite the cool night air Elizabeth seemed comfortable opening her jacket, then her blouse, before hoisting up her skirt and dropping her red lace knickers.

Jack smiled at the display he'd just witnessed. Elizabeth watched intently as his hand slowly reached into his jacket pocket. What she saw next made her eyes widen and for the second time in a few minutes she gasped again. Jack was holding a bulging wallet. He playfully removed a fresh, crisp banknote and handed it to her.

Elizabeth smiled back and with the skill and dexterity of a seasoned conjuror snatched it from his hand and, before his very eyes, made it disappear into her bra. As he began to unbutton the fly on his trousers, Elizabeth looked left and right in the alleyway, listening intently to make sure no one was aware of their presence. By the time she glanced back at Jack he was holding his weapon.

She gasped for the third time that night but her gasp wasn't as a result of looking at Jack's ten inch penis but rather at his seven inch knife. This gasp was the only sound Elizabeth could make as Jack's free hand immediately covered her mouth. The moonlight reflecting off the bright stainless steel blade was the last thing she ever saw.

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Jack was safely away from the scene of the crime when Elizabeth's body was discovered early the next morning by a street sweeper. His shouts alerted a nearby policeman who ran into the alley to see what all the commotion was about. Slumped on the floor, covered in blood and vomit, was Elizabeth, or rather what remained of her. The blood wasn't real of course. Jack had a large bottle of it in his briefcase and had poured it liberally over and around his victim before he left. The vomit however was real but Jack had nothing to do with it. It had been deposited by the shocked street sweeper when he first laid eyes upon the mutilated body. In fact, he had been so sick that the policeman slipped over in a puddle of it, causing him to fall on top of the dead body. Being covered in her remains and blood caused the policeman in turn to be violently sick so that when the State Police arrived shortly afterwards they were faced with what resembled a scene from a 'slasher / vomit' movie (if this niche horror genre ever exists).

Jack had performed exactly according to plan. Elizabeth had been carefully mutilated in order to give the casual observer, whether it was a member of public or a local policeman coming across the body for the first time, the impression that she had been attacked by a madman. Various body parts had been sliced off and arranged around her in a way that was either highly symbolic or completely random, depending on your point of view. Two of her toes had been inserted in her nostrils, her severed left hand was resting in her armpit and if you were brave or disturbed enough to gently prize open her bloody mouth you'd have been greeted by the sight of her left ear. Unlike the demonstration that took place in front of the scientists, Jack was careful not to leave any internal mechanical parts on view. To add to the horror and mystery of this bizarre killing, fake intestines were

draped over the victim's head like bizarre colon dreadlocks. The State Police were under strict orders to dispose of the body – and any subsequent bodies – before the local police could conduct a post mortem, but after enough photographs had been taken for the media.

Jack's first mission had been a triumph but as successful as this was, it was just the first part of Dick's master plan. Now that Benjamin was out of the way and he himself had apparently been cleared of any suspicion, Dick could perform his next task effectively and with gusto. Effectively managing the media following this attack would both ensure Jack's notoriety and Dick's fame.

CHAPTER 21

'Harlot Hacked To Pieces By Mystery Assailant'. The man in the expensive wool suit sitting in the expensive burgundy leather chair in the expensive oak-panelled office read the front cover of the Daily Morning News, then laid the paper down on his expensive walnut desk. Picking up the Daily Herald and The Chronicle he continued to read aloud the front page headlines. 'Satanic Streetwalker Slaughterer On The Loose'. 'Prostitute Disembowelled in Dastardly Disembowelling Attack'. Discarding these papers he smiled a smile that was half a smile of amusement and half a smile of approval. He turned to a smart, tall, distinguished-looking silver-haired gentleman wearing an elegant grey tailcoat.

'These reports. The handiwork of Jeremy Brunel at the Ministry of Information I assume, Carter?'

The man replied in a refined accent, 'Yes sir'.

He was about to say something else when there was a timid knock on the door, so timid in fact that it took twelve more knocks of increasing magnitude before it became even slightly audible.

'Sir', the silver haired man continued, 'I believe there is someone at the door'.

'Is there?'

Both men looked towards the door and listened intently.

'So there is'. The first man spoke to the door. 'Come!'

It opened and an attractive but meek-looking woman in her twenties entered carrying a thin folder.

'Good morning Leader. This is Vera Darling's updated report', she said hesitantly. 'It has just arrived'.

The Leader smiled again. This time however, it wasn't a smile of amusement or approval. Or even a smile of fulfilment or joy. It was a predatory smile. The sort of smile you'd give a young, attractive and impressionable girl in the knowledge that you were the most powerful person in the country. The sort of smile that implied that if she knew what was good for her, she would pander to his every whim. Then the smile changed into one of whimsy. A smile that reflected on earlier times. After a moment the smile vanished and the Leader sighed, conscious he must concentrate on the job in hand.

'Come here' Miss…'

'Hav… Havering'. The shy girl stammered and diverted her eyes from the Leader's steely glare.

'Come now. I won't bite!'. Despite this assurance, the Leader gave her a look which gave every impression that he was being very economical with the truth.

The girl walked cautiously towards him and stopped when she reached the imposing desk.

'You're new aren't you?'

'Yes Leader. I started yesterday'. She said, gingerly handing him the folder.

'Good, good. I'm sure you'll soon get used to me and my, er, how would you describe my working practices, Carter?'

The words Carter had in mind, but dared not say were, 'bloody strange', 'freakishly abnormal' or 'hellishly weird'. Instead he said, diplomatically, 'Idiosyncratic, sir?'

'"Idiosyncratic?" Yes. An excellent choice of words, Carter'.

As the Leader took the folder from a very nervous Miss Havering he gently held her chin and tilted her face up so he could look straight into her deep green eyes.

'That word, "idiosyncratic", it's a difficult one to get your tongue around isn't it? Could you get your tongue around it Miss Havering?'

Miss Havering gulped and nodded. 'Y-Yes sir'.

'Splendid!' said the Leader. His fingers moved from her chin and caressed her smooth, soft cheek just for a moment, but long enough for her to feel very uncomfortable. It was a very flushed-looking Miss Havering who left the office, closing the door behind her.

The Leader turned to his manservant. 'Carter, when we're done, tell Miss Havering that I want to see her back here at six o'clock'.

'Yes sir. And if she asks what for?'

'I don't care. Just tell her any old bullshit but make sure she is dressed appropriately'.

Carter raised his eyes and sighed inwardly at the same time as the Leader gently turned a hidden switch located under his desk. With a whirring sound, a piece of the wall panelling slowly and precisely slid upwards revealing a clothes rail which glided smoothly out into the office on castors. When this was fully extended the Leader rose and examined various items hanging there, feeling and smelling them, mentally weighing up their pros and cons.

'What do you think, Carter? Nurse or ballet dancer. Or maybe the cat woman?'

'It's a very personal choice, sir', Carter answered, shaking his head imperceptively.

'That it is, Carter. That it is'. The Leader continued to peruse everything on the rail, fingers deftly flicking across hangers. He'd almost examined every single item when his fingers stopped and his eyes lit up.

'Eureka! I forgot about this one. And it looks like it's her size'.

The leader removed a garment and looked at it admiringly before placing it in a bag and handing this to Carter.

‘Very good choice, sir’. Carter replied, placing the bag at his feet and wondering how on earth he’d manage to persuade a young and impressionable new member of the Party’s administration staff to meet with the Leader that evening dressed as a milkmaid.

Seated at his desk again, the clothes concealed once more behind the panelling, the Leader flicked though the folder.

‘Vera’s found herself a good protégé in this Mr. Brunel. I liked his plan for Jack but the follow-up is even more ingenious — capitalising on all the murders. The public have an insatiable appetite for scandal and gossip and seeding these stories in the media will spread the word like wildfire. The rogue mechanical harlots will soon be destroyed and over-sexed women and men will be too frightened to consider becoming prostitutes or indeed, visiting them. All in all, a terrifically good result, wouldn’t you agree?’

Carter nodded. ‘I would, sir. This Mr. Brunel seems to be quite skilled. It is fortunate that he has come to our attention’.

‘It is indeed’. The Leader put the folder down. This time he frowned. ‘He has demonstrated that he thinks very differently to his colleagues’.

Carter, who had been pondering whether Miss Havering would believe the ‘You’ve been enrolled on a farmyard familiarisation course’ story, was slightly taken aback by the Leader’s tone. ‘Thinking differently?’, Carter asked. ‘Well that’s commendable, isn’t it sir?’.

The Leader stood and looked out of his wide office window high up in the Party headquarters, lord over all he surveyed. He looked down at all the citizens going about their daily routine, a happy, content, but most importantly, controlled, population.

‘I’m not sure. Mr. Brunel worries me slightly. He’s conscientious, efficient and highly intelligent, all attributes the Party can exploit. Despite this, he makes me feel slightly uncomfortable. Something about him keeps irritating me. He’s like a tiny pebble in my shoe’.

The Leader closed his eyes and clenched his fists by his sides. He took a deep breath and shuddered.

‘I can feel… I can feel… a disturbance in the Fabric’.

Carter looked confused. ‘Does sir mean the curtains?’

The Leader sighed. He opened his eyes, sighed again, and turned to face Carter. ‘No. I mean the ‘Fabric’’.

‘As in cushion covers?’, added Carter.

‘No!’, exclaimed the Leader with more than a trace of annoyance in his voice. When I say ‘Fabric’ I mean the fabric of society. I mean I feel a disturbance in the energy that binds everything together in the universe and controls how it all works’.

Carter nodded and asked, ‘You mean like ‘a Force’. Like a ‘disturbance in ‘The Force’?’

The Leader's eyes instantly widened.

'Shhhhhhhhhhhh!', he exclaimed. 'Don't use that word!'

'"Force?"', asked a confused Carter.

'I said "don't say it!"' This time the Leader shouted.

'It's just that I think that talking about a disturbance in the Force is better than talking about a disturbance in the Fabric', Carter added, quite reasonably. 'A disturbance in the Fabric could be misconstrued as a flaw in the weave or defective stitching'.

The Leader hit the window hard with his fist before speaking through gritted teeth. 'I know… but we have to use a different word to…' He looked conspiratorially from side to side before whispering, 'Force'.

'Like "Fabric?"', Carter proposed.

'Yes, like "Fabric"', the Leader agreed, his patience fast wearing out, 'Because there are certain important legal issues involved, all right!?'.

The Leader had a way with his delivery that made it crystal clear when a matter was closed for discussion. This was one of those instances. Not only was the subject closed, it was boarded up with a sign saying 'Keep away' and two more that said 'Enter at your peril' and 'Beware of the dogs'. The Leader continued. 'Now where was I?'

'Mr. Brunel and the Fabric, sir', prompted Carter, with an almost unnoticeable inflection of contempt in his voice when he used the 'F' word.

'Yes, of course'. The Leader said, turning back from the window, 'I've instructed Vera to monitor his progress carefully'.

He studied a photograph of Dick that was fixed to the inside cover of the folder. 'He is a most interesting fellow who reminds me of someone else though I can't, for the sake of me, think who it is'.

Before the Leader could think any more about Jeremy Brunel, Carter had pulled a gun from his pocket and pointed it at him. In a flash the Leader almost simultaneously picked up a heavy table lighter from his desk and hurled it at the weapon, while throwing himself into his chair and propelling himself backwards. The lighter struck Carter on the wrist with a sharp 'crack'. He gave an exclamation of pain and dropped the gun, then in a move that belied his age, hurled himself over the desk straight at the Leader. The chair toppled over, dumping both men unceremoniously on the floor.

Rolling over and over on the thick pile carpet they both fought for supremacy and the chance to inflict serious physical damage on the other. The Leader was younger and more agile but Carter was a larger man and physically stronger. The two men rolled back and forth and would have rolled some more if the Leader's head hadn't thumped against the one of the substantial desk legs, causing

momentary concussion. Exploiting this moment, Carter used his weight to pin the Leader to the ground, managing to shuffle up his writhing body until he was astride him. Restraining the Leader's arms with his knees, Carter now had both his own hands free to strangle him and in fact, this was exactly what he did.

All the Leader could do was feel Carter's thick fingers slowly choke the life force out of him. He stared at his would-be assassin, seeing the hate deep in his eyes. He wondered what his own eyes looked like. Did they express pain or hopelessness? Or were they calm, waiting for the inevitable? No! There was still much work for him to do. Summoning a last ounce of strength, with his final gasp the Leader jerked and twisted his body. He heard his spine protest with a loud and unpleasant 'Click', but despite the pain, he managed to free one arm. Carter's strong hands were still gripped firmly around his neck but with his free arm, the Leader groped blindly around on the desk top. He could feel his windpipe slowly being crushed. Breaths were now laboured and infrequent. Then he felt what he'd been looking for and grasped it as if his life depended on it, which in fact, it did. Half a second later Carter felt the cold, sharp blade of the ornate letter opener pressed hard against his sinewy neck. This was the signal, and the persuasion he needed, to instantly remove his hands. Both men lay there panting; Carter from the exertion and the Leader from the fresh breaths that filled his lungs.

Carter got up and helped the Leader to his feet. 'You did well, sir', he said, breathing heavily.

'And you…'. The Leader was now taking in deep, measured breaths. 'You're a good bodyguard and an excellent adversary. Your attacks always keep me on my toes'. He picked Carter's gun up from the floor.

'Or in this case, on your back, sir'.

'Very good, Carter. Very good!'. With that, the Leader punched Carter playfully on his arm.

'I need to be on guard at all times against assassins. They could be anywhere, even people among us right now. For all I know Carter, *you* could be my assassin!'

The Leader pointed the gun at Carter's head. If Carter had been alarmed at this action he didn't show it, not even when the Leader squinted along the barrel and cocked the gun.

'Sir, I'm not your assassin. You have my word on that as a gentleman'.

The Leader smiled, then un-cocked the weapon and handed it to Carter, handle first. Carter took it and placed it back within his jacket.

'I know Carter, I trust you. I'm always glad to have you by my side particularly when there's a disturbance in the Fabric'.

‘Ah yes, sir. The Fabric’. Carter nodded, this time thinking about a linen tablecloth.

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Jack’s second victim was a sweet, smiling girl named Harriet. She smiled when she met Jack in bar called the Royal Sovereign on Bethnal Green Road and he offered to buy her a gin. She smiled as they joked and laughed in the corner of the saloon bar, warmed by the flames of a roaring fire and two or three other gins within her. She smiled when he agreed to her proposition and followed her out to the deserted narrow cobbled mews at the back of the bar. She stopped smiling however when Jack plunged his long sharp knife into her abdomen several times in quick succession.

Harriet’s body was found later that evening by two well-to-do gentlemen using the mews as a short cut to Dunbridge Street. Like Elizabeth, Jack had made sure her body was found in what the police would officially call a ‘distressed state’. The tabloid newspapers, fed by ‘anonymous but reliable Party sources’ (AKA Dick) didn’t exercise restraint in their descriptions of the body. The papers’ owners had seen circulations rise after the first crime was committed which is why they took it in their own hands to elaborate on this latest murder to make it even more sensational. Depending on which report you read Harriet’s body had been found with her liver, spleen and kidneys removed and arranged in a neat pile on her chest (or as neatly as you could pile various bodily organs), her pancreas, small intestines and appendix tucked in her jacket pockets, or her nose and heart shoved up her rectum. Or all of the above.

It didn’t really matter which version of events was most widely believed. What was important was that in a very short space of time two harlots had been murdered and mutilated by an anonymous killer. Prostitution was scandalous enough in this puritanical society, but prostitution linked to what seemed like a mentally deranged serial killer ensured the bloody attacks became the talk of the town and the country. Ordinarily, if the prostitutes were real flesh and blood women they’d be absolutely terrified and would stay off the streets until the killings stopped but these man-made women didn’t operate with real logic or emotions. Their programming meant their prime directive was to entice men into having sex with them at any cost. That’s why deaths three, four and five followed later that week. And six and seven the week later.

By this time the deaths were making prime time television news. Dick had drip-fed various reports into the media to promote pro-Party

messages. Rumours were rife that the vicious killer was a member of the Resistance, that he was someone who had avoided his monthly injections, a foreigner, a philanderer, an atheist, or a chronic masturbator. Once these stories had been planted speculation spread like wildfire, fanned by the winds of public interest and a circulation frenzy

'Serial Slasher Slays and Slices Seventh!' screamed the most recent front page headline. The Leader smiled, placed the paper down on his desk and leaned back in his chair. He'd been reviewing Jack's progress on a regular basis via Vera's reports and decided to commend Mr. Brunel on his good work once all the prostitutes had been terminated. He thought that as long as he could manage his unbelievably hectic workload he would try and meet Jeremy in person. As he contemplated this, the Leader shivered and looked around his office. He had that niggling feeling again and his foot was irritating him. If he didn't know better he would have sworn there was a small pebble in the toe of his shoe.

CHAPTER 22

It was Susan who next intercepted Dick on his way home one evening and, after the usual blindfolding procedure, took him to the resistance headquarters. Dick was a little frustrated that the location still had to be kept a secret from him but Susan explained that it had been two years before she had been trusted enough to be told.

'So Taylor doesn't trust me?', Dick asked over the hum of the hovercar.

'Of course he does', said Susan. 'He has every confidence in you'.

'Did he have every confidence in Benjamin too?', Dick asked.

'That colleague of yours at the Ministry?'

'Yes'. Dick replied. 'My colleague who, it turns out, was also in the Resistance. You must know him. In his mid-thirties. About five eight. Slightly built. Dark hair'.

'Do you know the name he used in the Resistance?'

'No', Dick admitted.

'Well I can't help you. His description is too general. And besides, even if I can't identify him by his appearance, I would know something as important as us having another member working alongside you at the Ministry'. Susan thought again about Benjamin and shook her head. 'You're wrong about him being in the Resistance', she said. 'Definitely wrong'.

Dick was confused and wondered how Taylor had even managed to conceal Benjamin's identity and role from even his closest colleagues.

'As far as I know', Susan continued. 'You're the only man we've got on the inside'.

'Would you like a man on the inside?', Dick asked, making a very clumsy come-on. He rested his hand gently on Susan's thigh and squeezed it, finding it hard and unyielding. Susan picked up his hand, took it off the metal transmission tunnel between the seats of the hovercar and placed it in her lap.

'Yes please. After tonight's meeting. Can you teach me something new?', she asked.

'I'm sure I can. Tonight's lesson can be the Three R's: Role Play, Rimming and Reach Arounds'.

If the Party had been keeping Susan's hovercar under surveillance that evening they would have been confused by its very erratic flight path as it jerked and jolted around. This wasn't a result of any control problems with the vehicle but rather the fact that Susan found it difficult concentrating on driving given what Dick was doing with his fingers between her legs. When they eventually arrived at the

resistance headquarters Dick was surprised to learn that Taylor wasn't there. Surprised and pleased. Edward and Grace were going about their business, Susan had gone off to have a shower and there was a member, Clifford, who he'd never met before, who was studying intelligence reports on the recent movements of Party hierarchy. Dick wandered around and eventually found Alice in the small dimly-lit library, engrossed in a newspaper with a pile of several others close by.

'So, no Taylor?', Dick asked, shutting the door behind him. He guessed the answer but was seeking comfort in its confirmation.

Alice looked up and smiled. 'No. He's working late'.

'At his day job?', Dick enquired.

Alice nodded.

'Which is…' Dick trailed off, waiting for Alice to answer.

'I don't know. None of us know'.

'But I thought that of everyone here, you'd know'. Dick sat down facing her. 'I mean, you're very close to him. Almost joined at the hip'. Dick smiled. 'And from what I also know, almost joined at the groin'.

Alice blushed slightly.

Dick probed Alice some more. Not in the way he would have liked, but in the interrogatory sense.

'What is it between you and Taylor?' he asked. 'I know you're lovers but it's more than that. There's some sort of strange bond between you that I've never seen between resistance members'.

Alice was now a fetching shade of pink. Dick continued, oblivious to her discomfort.

'He's very possessive towards you. Almost obsessively so'.

'And is that a problem Mr. Longg?', Alice asked, now looking directly at him.

'Well, yes'.

Alice looked slightly confused.

'You see, I'm jealous'. Dick paused to gauge Alice's reaction. She continued to look at him with a puzzled expression. Dick took the newspaper from her grasp and gently held her hands in his.

'Ever since the day you literally appeared in my life I've desired you. Of course, I desire most women, but you… there was something different about you from the start. I can't figure you out Alice. The way you play hard to get. I'm not used to that. The way you act, you'd think you were a fully paid-up, suppressed member of the population. Take Susan or Grace. They're absolutely gagging for sex — anything with a pulse will do. But you, it's like you're still repressed. Or is it that you're a one-man woman Alice? And if so, how did that happen. It's like Taylor has some hold over you. What is it with him Alice? Is he your svengali?'

Alice shrugged. ‘I love Taylor. We have a sort of “understanding”. He’s done a lot for me’.

‘I’m sure’, said Dick leaning forwards. ‘And I’d like to do a lot *to* you’.

With that, he leant forward and kissed Alice full on her ruby lips. Dick expected her to resist him, to hammer her small fists into his chest, slap him around the face, pull his hair or his eyebrows (which would have hurt a lot more), scream for help and generally cause a commotion. Her submissive reaction, instead, caught him by surprise. She offered no resistance as Dick pulled her head towards his and parted her lips, exploring her wet mouth with his tongue. The desk between them was an obstacle to further passion so Dick rose up from his chair, helping to lift Alice out of hers. With their mouths still locked together the two of them performed an ungainly tango around the desk until Alice was standing with her back towards it. Dick gently kissed her neck and slowly began to undo the buttons of her dress.

Ordinarily this action would have been tantalisingly sexual. In this case, given the unreasonably large number of buttons and the fact that Dick didn’t carry a button-hook, it took an unfeasible length of time. In lesser men, passion would have subsided but Dick wasn’t a lesser man and he was still hard while the last button popped open. Almost in an act of triumph he swept the papers and Alice’s handbag off the table and gently lowered Alice down.

She lay there in her underwear, arms spread, her tongue flicking over her wet lips. Swiftly removing his trousers Dick leaned over her and nuzzling her face, drank in her sweet nectar-like perfume. He moved slowly down, kissing her whole sensual body, paying particular attention to her firm breasts that were rising and falling with her increasing heavy breathing. Dick’s tongue played with her navel, then he buried his face in her warm groin, almost tasting the sex that was just moments away. Dick teased Alice, turning his focus to her inner thighs, licking and kissing them within an inch of her crotch. It was as he was tugging the silk of her panties with his teeth that Dick got another surprise. As surprises went, this was one of the biggest he’d experienced since his arrival here. He froze, and then he raised his head.

Dick tried to speak but he was so shocked, no words formed. He made a second attempt. This time he emitted a sort of strangulated sound, the sort you make when you’re gargling with mouthwash for too long until you reach that point of half swallowing and half retching. The third time he managed to get his mouth to work.

‘Alice?!’, Dick said, managing to simultaneously combine the intonation of a question and an exclamation.

‘Dick!’, a voice shouted in response. It was a deep voice. It was a

man's voice. In fact it was a voice that sounded very similar to that of Taylor. Dick had been so carried away with his foreplay with Alice that he'd failed to hear the library door open. The light spilling in from the hallway framed the imposing form of Taylor in the doorway.

'Taylor!' Dick exclaimed in a mixture of embarrassment and horror.

'Taylor!', Alice exclaimed in exactly the same way.

Dick and Alice got up from the table and began to hurriedly dress. Taylor entered the library, shutting the door behind him.

'I told you that Alice was special, didn't I?'

Dick nodded, then fell over, having put both feet in one trouser leg. He picked himself up. He didn't need to say anything to Taylor. His wide-eyed expression said more than mere words ever could.

'You saw the numbers, didn't you?'

Dick nodded again. The numbers. He had seen the numbers. And had immediately remembered where he'd seen them before. On the inner thighs of the robot prostitutes. Then the enormity of the situation hit Dick like a frying pan full in the face. He'd been about to fuck a robot.

'I kept Alice's secret from everyone, and wanted to keep it a secret from you', Taylor explained, walking towards them. 'And I would have, if you hadn't decided to bury your face in her damn crotch!' Alice was now fully-dressed, looking at the floor with a shamed expression. Dick replaced the contents that had fallen out of Alice's handbag when he'd knocked it to the floor, and handed it to her. She snatched the bag back, glared at him and then ran over towards Taylor who held her tight. Dick was experiencing a veritable rollercoaster of emotions. He felt terrible that he'd betrayed the trust of his leader and mentor. He felt guilty for taking advantage of the demure Alice. And he felt a combination of abject horror and peculiar arousal that he'd been moments away from having sex with a robot — coupled with more than a slight feeling of disappointment that he hadn't.

'But… how…why… when…' He burbled.

Taylor released his grip on Alice and she walked quickly out of the library, closing the door behind her.

'Sit down Dick. Sit down' said Taylor. I'll tell you all about it.

The two men sat at the table. Taylor leant forward to talk and Dick flinched. It was a reflex action to avoid the inevitable punch in the face from a man who had caught you red-handed going down on his robotic girlfriend. But Taylor didn't throw a punch. Instead he sighed. There then followed an awkward silence, during which time Dick flinched twice more, certain Taylor would punch him without warning,

‘You’re lost for words because you’re so angry, is that it?’ Dick asked.

‘I’m not angry Dick… well I am, but I’m also relieved. Relieved that you know the truth’.

Dick looked at him with a puzzled expression.

‘It was only time before you found out. It was obvious you were especially attracted to Alice. What just happened was simply the inevitable’.

‘I’m really sorry Taylor, I truly am’, Dick said with genuine remorse. ‘You’re right. There was a weird attraction. She appeared so straight-laced and uptight that she became, well, a sort of challenge to me’. Looking Taylor in the eye Dick continued. ‘It won’t happen again. I swear to that. You can trust me in a room alone with her; you have my word of honour. OK, you might think that doesn’t count for anything but I’m deadly serious’.

‘I know’, Taylor said. ‘I believe you’.

Leaning forward, now confident that Taylor wasn’t going to hit him, Dick posed the question he’d been absolutely dying to ask.

‘Does anyone else know about the fact that she’s… er, well, you know, a…’

Taylor interrupted Dick to save him the embarrassment of saying something like ‘mechanical’, ‘not human’ or ‘a fucking robot’.

‘No. No one knows the truth. You’ve probably guessed that Alice was part of Project Gladstone but I couldn’t say anything when you told us you were working on it’.

‘Did you work on the project?’, Dick enquired.

‘In a sort of way’, answered Taylor.

‘Did you help to design them?’. Dick was intrigued.

‘Let’s just say that some of my skills were utilised. I’ve got an electronic engineering background, but I can’t tell you any more. Alice was one of the last working prototypes. She never went out in the field and was supposed to have been scrapped after final testing’. Dick was still slightly stunned as Taylor continued his revelation. ‘With the help of another resistance member I managed to ‘rescue’ Alice and de-activate certain parts of her programming. She was given a new identity like you and well, here she is, ostensibly an ordinary member of society but a key member of the Resistance. The Party has no idea she still exists’.

‘Couldn’t you have re-programmed her to be totally faithful to you?’, Dick asked, quite insensitively.

‘I wish I could’, Taylor replied. ‘But I don’t have the necessary skills. Changing her prime directive was one thing, but altering the rest of her behaviour is beyond my abilities’.

‘Does she know that she’s… er, well, you know, a…’

Taylor cut him short again. ‘Yes. It’s part of her programming. She has to know what she really is in order that she understands the importance of concealing the truth from anyone. Plus, of course, if you found a serial number imprinted on your inner thigh, it would only get you wondering wouldn’t it?’

‘Until I saw that’, Dick explained, ‘I had absolutely no idea at all. I didn’t even realise when she was almost naked. She’s a perfect replica. There are some people I’ve known who are, well, less human than her’.

‘I know. The realism is uncanny, isn’t it? But there was one aspect of the design and engineering that even the best technological brains in the Party couldn’t overcome. One thing they had to conceal’.

Dick threw Taylor one of his puzzled expressions.

‘The smell. The hydraulic fluid necessary for their operation has a characteristic and unusual smell. You must have noticed that from the demonstration of Jack’.

Dick thought back and remembered that Jack and the robot harlots built for the demonstration shared a very odd odour. ‘That’s right! I mentioned it to one of the technicians who said that when Jack was sent out into the field, that smell would be masked by a strong cologne’.

‘That’s why Alice wears her distinctive perfume’, Taylor explained. ‘To mask the oil’.

Dick smiled. He’d been aware of her alluring perfume from the first time she appeared in his trailer. If only he knew then the real reason she wore it. He nodded and then asked Taylor with an astonishing amount of insensitivity, ‘What’s it like fucking a machine?’

This time Taylor did punch Dick in the face.

CHAPTER 23

Sitting in the lounge a short time later with his colleagues Dick discretely nursed his bruised jaw. As relationships with your boss went, he wasn't doing so well. So far in their brief relationship Taylor had kneed Dick in the groin and punched him in the face, but if Taylor harboured a deep-seated feeling of seething resentment towards Dick then this was currently well-concealed. He was as civil and as friendly as usual. Likewise, if Alice had been distressed about what had taken place earlier on the library table then she certainly didn't show it.

The three of them, Edward and Susan were discussing the extraordinary news of the capture and likely execution of Benjamin Faraday. Taylor vehemently denied that Benjamin had been a member of the Resistance and that his arrest was as much of a surprise to him as it had been to Dick. By the strengths of his protests and those of his colleagues Dick was starting to believe that Taylor might actually be telling the truth. Taylor, meanwhile, was angry with himself that Benjamin's anti-Party sentiment had not come to his attention earlier – and for not recruiting him. He wondered how many other people like Benjamin had slipped through the net; valuable additional members the Resistance so dearly needed. This was being discussed when, in an extraordinary coincidence, Grace rushed into the room with a copy of the London Evening Telegraph in her hand and an excited look on her face.

'I think we might have found a potential new member!', she said eagerly. 'Look!'

Grace pointed energetically at the open paper. Dick joined Taylor, Alice, Susan and Edward in staring at the page.

'New Indian tiger for London Zoological Gardens?' Dick asked, pondering a) why they would recruit a tiger and b) how they would train it to such a degree that it would be useful to the Resistance, let alone cure it of its innate man-eating instincts.

'No!', Grace, exclaimed, pointing excitedly to the page again.

Dick tried to follow her finger but this was difficult as she was waving it about so frantically.

'New Sewerage System for Manchester?' If Dick had doubts about recruiting a tiger then enlisting the help of a sewage system made absolutely no sense whatsoever. Dick thought the whole notion was fraught with impracticalities, starting with the fact that they would need an unfeasibly large volume of perfume to hide its stench. Dick's colleagues however, didn't share his confusion.

'Well spotted Grace', Taylor said. 'This is definitely worth

investigating further'.

'What an odd story!' added Alice, which made Dick even more determined to find out what all the fuss was about.

'What is it?', asked Dick, the frustration evident in his voice.

'This!'. Susan picked up the paper and thrust it in Dick's face. She read out the headline of a very small story sandwiched between 'New bandstand for Kensington Gardens' and something equally un-newsworthy about a new iron ore smelting process.

'Man Arrested For Molestation of Statue'.

Dick took the paper and scanned the story. According to the article a man had been arrested for being intoxicated and trying to have sexual relations with a statue of Queen Victoria in Regents Park.

'So?'. Dick handed the paper back to Susan. Apart from a very slight comedic value in the story and a weak pun about 'statutory rape', he couldn't see what all the fuss was about.

'So? So!' said Taylor. 'This is a great opportunity! Someone displaying anti-Party sentiments'.

'What, being drunk?', Dick asked.

'No, being sexually repressed. Trying to have sex with a statue!', Susan explained.

Dick still thought they were placing too much importance on the story. 'The man was drunk and drunk people do lots of odd things', he said. They're sick in doorways, they start fights and they marry people they shouldn't in Las Vegas. Just because he was humping a statue doesn't mean anything!'

Taylor smiled. 'But it does, Dick. You see the monthly injections are designed to suppress sexual desires, whether conscious or subconscious. The dosage is such that this sort of behaviour should not take place. How it even got reported is another matter. You can be certain that the story will be pulled from a later edition'.

'What it means', Susan explained, 'Is that the man who did this had latent desires that even the injections can't quash. All the alcohol did was temporarily allow these dormant feelings to rise to the surface'.

'Think of it as a catalyst', added Alice.

It was Edward's turn to support this assumption. 'We've seen it before Dick, the same sort of behaviour. Trust us. This man is a good candidate to join the Resistance'.

Dick looked at the four of them, all smug and self-satisfied in their suppositions. To him the man was clearly pissed. Nothing more and nothing less. If he'd been caught molesting a statue of Scarlett Johansson then there might be something in what they were saying, but it could only be intoxication, pure and simple, to make someone fake sex with a statue of the ugliest queen ever (and that includes

Queen Dorete of Denmark, the wife of Eric VII, who had warts and a small moustache). It was one thing he thought, to use Victoria's image for private arousal, but trying to have sex with her statue in public was definitely not the action of a sober man. As far as this newspaper article went, Dick felt his colleagues were reading far too much into it.

'I've done some research and you know the most amazing thing about this story?' said Grace.

'This ordinary story about a drunk man?'

Grace ignored Dick's sarcasm and dropped her bombshell. 'He is a low-ranking member of the Party!'.

Taylor's pipe dropped from his mouth. If Edward, Alice and Susan had been smoking pipes, then theirs too would also have fallen out in the exact same way. But they weren't, so they just looked shocked instead.

Grace continued. 'Out of interest I crossed referenced his name with our intelligence records and sure enough, found a match. He's called David Parnell. He's an assistant to the assistant under-secretary to the deputy joint executive in charge of canal digging!'

Dick was suffering from SUS, Severe Underwhelment Syndrome, a condition and a term he'd just invented but which seemed more than appropriate for this moment.

Taylor displayed an almost orgasmic level of excitement. 'Don't you see?', he asked, 'This is a man who has displayed anti-Party behaviour *and* who is actually a member of the Party. Recruiting him will be such a coup!'.

'Sure, if you want to find out all the dirt on canal digging!', Dick added with an equal degree of cynicism and unhelpfulness, and a smug feeling about his word-play.

'It doesn't matter', Taylor continued. 'However minor his role, he's a member of the Party and would be able to give us names, positions, news, rumours… anything like that is priceless'.

Edward concurred. 'That sort of information, even if it's seemingly inconsequential, helps complete our picture of the Party'.

'Whatever'. Dick shrugged, still not convinced.

Taylor, Edward, Susan and Grace left the room in a high state of excitement to double check the records, leaving Alice and Dick alone.

'You look jealous', Alice said.

Dick frowned. 'Me? Why?'

'This new man, David Parnell. If we manage to recruit him he could provide invaluable information. Are you worried we might discover he's actually more useful to the Resistance than you?'

Alice, apart from having full, firm breasts and the most squeezable ass Dick had seen in a long, long time had obviously been programmed with the kind of logic circuits to give her a woman's

intuition. He laughed out loud, the sort of false laugh that usually means you're covering up for some sort of insecurity.

'Me? Jealous? Come on!' said Dick as convincingly as he could.

'Why not?' pressed Alice. 'You told me before that you were jealous of Taylor and I. If envy is a weakness then it's not so unbelievable that you'd be jealous about someone who might usurp your place and your role in the Resistance, is it?'

Dick laughed out loud again. More of a 'guffaw' this time, and just as unconvincing. Deep down Dick knew she could have a point. And even deeper down he knew she was right.

'That's crazy', he said. 'I think the whole idea of this guy making some anti-Party demonstration is ridiculous however in the unlikely event he is what you all claim, then that's great. I'd welcome him with open arms — in a brotherly way of course, not as some precursor to any form of man-love that might lead to naked wrestling, touching willies or sodomy'. Alice was now staring at him. Dick shrugged and continued. 'Sure I'd welcome him here. Any enemy of the Party is a friend of mine'.

'As you say, Mr. Longg. As you say'. With that, an unconvinced Alice left the room, leaving Dick alone with his thoughts and a teeny weeny bit of jealously.

'Anyway', Dick said under his breath in an effort to comfort himself, 'I bet he's got a really small penis'.

Sure enough, that news story had disappeared from the later edition of the paper, giving credence to Taylor's assumptions. Further painstaking research conducted the next day by Humphrey established that David Parnell had been arrested and taken to West End Central police station for questioning. Taylor thought that while there was a very small chance that the Party would make David Parnell 'disappear', it was far more likely that he'd be fined, demoted – and given an extra dose of chemical suppressants. Because the Resistance now knew where he worked, it was an easy enough task for one of the members to follow him home one night and note his address.

Everything moved very quickly after that. The same source in the Resistance who supplied Dick's entire fake back-story manage to access David Parnell's permanent record. This contained details of a series of minor incidents going back over several years that, when viewed in isolation, were just that; minor incidents: vandalism, drunken behaviour and public disorder. Nothing that demonstrated any real degree of dissent, but which definitely did hint at someone dissatisfied with the status quo. Under Taylor's direction David Parnell was placed under detailed surveillance. Further investigations failed to throw up any questions or issues about his legitimacy or sincerity, and verified Taylor's original assumption that he was a good potential

resistance member. That being the case, plans were made to contact him.

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At the next meeting Taylor updated everyone on the process to recruit Parnell.

'Don't you think you're moving a little too fast?', Dick enquired. 'I thought you said that the recruiting procedure for new members took months. You said you had to be overwhelmingly confident that the prospect was entirely safe to introduce'.

'You're right', Taylor admitted, 'But we're extremely concerned about this secret weapon that the Party are developing. Each day that passes is a day they're closer to using it'.

'But we're not sure about the weapon. It's still just a rumour isn't it?', Dick enquired.

'It is, but a very strong rumour, and one from several different sources. That makes it a rumour we can't afford to ignore'.

'Just because you haven't uncovered any definite proof about it Mr. Longg, doesn't mean it doesn't exist'. Humphrey added. There were murmurs of agreement within the room. Dick recoiled from the pointed criticism.

'Have faith. Taylor has weighed up the situation and he knows what he's doing. There are sufficient precautions in place to safeguard our identities and location'. This was Alice's turn to add support to her lover and she did it with a look that said, 'You were wrong about Mr. Parnell and you're still jealous of him'. It was also a look that said, 'And when he gets here I'm going to have really good sex with him' — but then Dick thought that maybe he was reading a little too much into her look.

When it was Dick's turn to report on developments he told his resistance colleagues that Jack had so far located and dispatched eleven of the rogue harlots. In his job at the Ministry he continued to seed all variety of rumours about the murders including fake confessional letters from the killer in which he signs his name Jack. All these reports were being lapped up by the public which still demonstrated an unquenchable desire for all things associated with the killings. In addition to these news stories papers were devising their own crowd-pleasing features like 'The Ripper Diet', 'Are YOU a Prostitute?' personality tests and even 'Jack the Ripper Bingo'. Dick even planted a few reports that said that Jack had killed prostitutes *and* their clients in the same bloody brutal attacks (the men, stories claimed, had been found with their severed penises in their own

mouths). Discouraging women from becoming prostitutes was the key objective, but putting men off visiting them was equally important.

The Party didn't mind the fact that conflicting stories confused the police and ultimately wasted their time. The intention of these reports was to make sure everyone got the message that prostitution, as the Party had always claimed, was a 'great social evil'. Of that, after Dick's sustained media campaign, there was absolutely no doubt.

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Although Dick was kept busy, his days at the Ministry had become rather routine. The Ripper business would continue until all the robot prostitutes had been killed, and then maybe a little longer. (At his most cynical and manipulative, Dick was toying with the idea of a moral ending to Jack's reign of terror; having him killed off in a fight to the death by a god-fearing, Party-supporting, non-masturbating, happily-married man — that sort of thing). Each day he monitored transcripts of the television news, studied press cuttings, planned and implemented future activity and briefed Vera on his activity. Just when he felt he'd been forgotten and wouldn't receive any more recognition for the excellent work he was doing, he got the call. As calls went this one was very, very welcome, and in fact featured in Dick's Top Three Calls Of All Time.

The first was the time he learned he was being inducted into the Pornography Hall of Fame, having his penis imprinted for perpetuity in cement outside a seedy cinema off Hollywood Boulevard. The second of the top three calls was the time he was told he would be appearing on the cover of Newsweek as 'The Man With The Golden Cock' (this was a feature on his immense wealth and not an incident involving a pet rooster and a can of spray paint). This latest Top Call came when Dick was in the middle of charting week-on-week newspaper coverage.

'Mr. Brunel', a serious voice intoned over the phone, 'This is Jonathan Claygate from Party headquarters. Your presence is requested tomorrow afternoon at 1600 hours'.

Dick's default response was to feel guilty and panic. He looked up and saw Vera sitting on her platform, head raised up from a massive pile of papers, smiling at him. She winked and Dick knew that this was the call he'd been waiting for. He was going to Party HQ to be congratulated in person. Maybe he'd be given a promotion. Now his skills had been recognised, the sky was the limit. A sub-section under-manager? No, he was better than that. A department deputy head? What about 'Head Assistant to the Deputy Leader?' Or 'Deputy Head

Assistant to the Leader?' He liked the sound of that. In fact, he thought he'd be happy with any position with 'Leader' in the title. Well not a title involving the words 'Syphy Leader' or 'Pooh Pants Leader', obviously.

'Mr. Brunel? Mr. Brunel? Hello…' Dick was shaken back to reality by the impatient voice still emanating from the receiver.

'Hello Mr. Claygate. Sorry about that. I'll be delighted to be there tomorrow'.

'Good. Be ready in your reception at fifteen forty where a ministerial hovercar will pick you up. Goodbye'.

With that, Mr. Claygate was gone. Dick put the phone down, still in a state of shock. He looked up at Vera who smiled and winked at him once more. Dick smiled back. He wasn't certain which high-ranking Party official he was going to meet but just to be summoned to Party headquarters was enough at this moment. Dick couldn't wait to tell Taylor about this invitation. This was his chance to infiltrate the Party hierarchy, discover their plans and fulfil his mission. He didn't give a shit about this young upstart David 'I simulated sex with a statue of Queen Victoria' Parnell. He might join the Resistance and impress them with his stupid party connections via his even stupider canal building-related career but what he wouldn't be doing was travelling in a chauffeur driven car to Party HQ. Dick just knew Alice would be suitably impressed.

CHAPTER 24

As journeys go, the one to the Party HQ was very uneventful. Dick tried to strike up a conversation with the young driver but only succeeded in establishing that he was being driven by a Grade III chauffeur who was only permitted to drive and not talk to passengers. Well, that's not strictly true, he could obviously talk to passengers to tell them this — and also explain the differences in the party driver hierarchy. Grade II chauffeurs were allowed to respond to passengers but not instigate conversation, while if you achieved the heady heights of Grade I you could converse freely with passengers on journeys longer than 10 miles or a half hour in duration (whichever was shorter), as long as you showed due deference. The New Victorian class system was alive and well in the front of this hovercar as it sped westwards through London. After about fifteen minutes the Party HQ came into sight, an austere tower block on the south bank of the Thames. Dick had travelled past it many times, always wondering what went on behind its faceless exterior. Now, he hoped, he was going to find out.

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It took a lot to impress Dick but the glazed triple height atrium and thirty-foot fir trees growing within it with squirrels leaping from bough to bough almost did the trick. Looking around at this grand entrance Dick could easily see where the population's taxes were being spent. He scanned the trees again. There were squirrels everywhere he looked. He scanned the lobby and the only thing more numerous than the squirrels were armed guards. Those who weren't positioned at security stations were on patrol, and those who weren't on patrol were milling about, getting ready to go on patrol. Dick guessed that the security here was tighter than the pussy of a Mother Superior (Dick had never had sex with a Mother Superior, although he once got a blow job from a novice nun who it turned out, struggled more with his zip than with her faith).

Dick had his fingerprints and voice scanned and then re-scanned. Then he was frisked and only then was he allowed into the elevator that whisked him to the twenty-second level. The elevator came to a gentle stop, far gentler than the elevator in the Ministry of Information. The doors glided silently open and Dick was met by an anonymous Party member who escorted him into a high-ceilinged antechamber. Dick's escort told him that someone would collect him

in ten minutes and in the meantime he should make himself comfortable. There was little to entertain Dick. On a small console table were the de rigueur copies of the Bible and the Party manifesto, and adorning the walls, a selection of framed posters from recent campaigns run by the Ministry of Information, including one Dick himself had devised about the perils of syphilis. He wondered if he should point this out when he met whoever it was he was going to meet — but thought better of it. He was sure that the Party knew more about him than he knew about himself, and to be boastful about his work, would be considered distasteful and a sign, no doubt, of ill-breeding.

Dick had learned soon after starting work that the Party ran everything like clockwork, which was quite appropriate given their Victorian influences. In this society, being promised a wait of ten minutes meant ten minutes and not eighteen, fifteen or even eleven minutes. And so it was exactly ten minutes later when the opposite door to the antechamber was opened by another anonymous Party member who ushered Dick through into what turned out to be another ante-chamber. In effect this made the first room, the one containing the framed posters, an 'ante-antechamber' not an 'antechamber'. (If you want to be really picky you can change this in biro where relevant. If you don't want to do this in case it ruins your book, well fair enough. It won't spoil your reading pleasure). Anyhow, in the real ante-chamber Dick was scanned and frisked again although this seemed rather pointless as all he could have concealed since his first frisking and this latest one were the Bible and Party Manifesto, neither of which would make effective weapons, even if you dropped them on someone's foot.

The same Party member then ushered Dick through yet another set of heavy double doors into another room. Don't worry though. This wasn't yet another antechamber, requiring you to make yet more amendments in biro. No, this was a Grand Room. Dick's polished brogues sank sensuously into deep pile blue woollen carpet. Concealed pelmet lighting painted a warm glow on the vaulted ceiling. The focal point of this room was a long polished walnut burr table surrounded by twelve sumptuously upholstered chairs that complemented the colour of the carpet. The door closed almost silently behind Dick leaving him alone to contemplate the splendour of his environment; more surroundings seemingly at odds with the austerity preached by the Party. A matching set of double doors were set into the opposite wall and in one corner of the room was an elegant inlaid mahogany drinks cabinet. Dick was peering through the small inset glass panels when he was startled by a sudden deep, rich voice.

'I know what you're thinking'.

Dick turned around and froze. ‘Fuck me’, he thought, thankful he hadn’t actually said it aloud. Facing him was the Leader. Not the Deputy Leader or the Assistant Leader. Or even the Assistant to the Deputy Leader, but the actual Leader himself. He hadn’t heard him enter the room but there he was, standing just feet away from him accompanied by an older, elegant-looking grey-haired man. The Leader was tall, well-groomed with an air of sophistication about him and he strode towards Dick, smiling.

‘You’re thinking how can a Party which promotes such a sober, stern, serious image and an almost puritanical approach to governance, surround itself with such luxury, such ostentation?’

The Leader was quite right, That was exactly what Dick had been thinking about. But when he saw the Leader this close and in the flesh for the first time, this thought was immediately replaced by another. The new thought was how familiar the Leader looked.

‘Is everything all right Mr. Brunel?’, the Leader enquired. ‘You look somewhat perturbed’.

‘Y-yes sir. Thank you sir. I… You surprised me when you entered’.

The Leader and Dick faced each other. The Leader offered his hand and Dick grasped it. This time it was the Leader’s turn to look ever so slightly surprised.

‘We haven’t met have we Mr. Brunel?’

‘N-no, sir’, Dick said nervously.

‘Of course not’, replied the Leader, holding Dick’s hand very firmly, still looking intently at him. ‘It must be the photograph in your file. I’ve seen it many times. It must be that’.

‘Yes sir. Probably’.

‘Good, good!’, the Leader finished shaking Dick’s hand and motioned to his companion to come over.

‘Mr, Brunel, this is Carter my faithful manservant and bodyguard’.

Carter nodded at Dick who graciously nodded back.

‘Whiskey?’ asked the Leader.

‘Yes please,’ replied Dick.

Carter opened the well-stocked cabinet and carefully poured two generous straight whiskies from an elegant lead-crystal decanter.

‘To Jack and to success’, the Leader toasted. ‘Your success’.

Dick gave an embarrassed smile. ‘Thank you, sir’.

‘I’ve been following your progress with great interest, Mr. Brunel. It was only down to my full diary that it’s taken so long for us to meet. I’ve been impressed with your abilities so far. Very impressed’.

Dick felt uncomfortable. He was still shocked from the combination of having an audience with the actual Leader and having all this praise heaped upon him. But there was also the weird feeling that he’d seen the Leader somewhere else. Then it struck him — and

Dick felt very stupid. Very stupid indeed. As stupid as someone who had the nickname 'Shit-For-Brains'. It was obvious. He'd recognised the Leader from all his inspirational early morning announcements and speeches.

Gesturing around the room the Leader spoke. 'Now, let me explain, or as some less charitable people might say, justify, these grand surroundings hidden from public gaze'.

The ever-attentive Carter refilled both their glasses. The leader continued. 'You see, Mr. Brunel, I govern in a slightly different way from my predecessors. Of course, it's vital that we continue to promote the beliefs and values of the original New Victorians. That is essential to the well-being of the population and the prosperity of our great nation. But I also feel that those in a position of power should be able to enjoy certain, shall we say, guilty pleasures as an antidote to the pressures of governing and as a means of relaxation'.

'Work hard, play harder?', offered Dick, summarising his own life philosophy.

The Leader beamed. 'Precisely, Mr. Brunel. Precisely'. He chinked glasses with Dick again. 'All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy'.

'Not my Jack', added Dick.

The Leader smiled and put a firm hand on Dick's shoulder. 'I like the cut of your cloth Mr. Brunel. You are a like-minded fellow, and someone I feel who could be a real asset to the Party in the future'.

'I hope so, sir. I am dedicated to furthering the cause of The Party and feel I have a lot to offer', Dick replied with a cringing degree of obsequiousness.

'Good. We could always do with more men like you. You would be a useful addition to my Ruling Council'.

'Ruling Council?' Dick enquired, slightly shaken at hearing that such a body existed, let alone being invited to join it. 'I didn't know there was one. I thought you alone made all decisions'.

'I do. Well, as far as the public is concerned I do. It's important that they see me and me alone as the ultimate power. It's all to do with the cult of personality, you know'.

Dick nodded, not sure what this cult was, whether he was expected to join it, or whether it had any initiation rites like human sacrifice or chanting or dancing naked in a forest and if it did, he hoped it would be a warm night and he could keep his shoes on in case he got pine needles stuck in his feet.

'But governing this fine nation is such a lonely task', the Leader continued, 'And a never-ending one. For these reasons I surround myself with a tight-knit, utterly loyal and dedicated team of advisors. We meet weekly to review policy decisions and discuss their impact. Sometimes I act on their advice. Other times I choose to ignore it. The

difficulty arises when I receive conflicting recommendations but as Leader I have the ultimate say'.

'Making no decision is worse than making a bad decision', Dick offered, as if he was quoting from a Christmas cracker motto.

The leader turned to his manservant. 'See Carter, more witty truths cascade from the lips of this very talented individual'. He consulted an expensive-looking pocket watch. 'Unfortunately however, I now have to go. I am to attend the dedication of a new bridge'.

'A road opening ceremony, sir', Carter corrected him.

'Oh yes. See Mr. Brunel. So many things to do, but mere trivialities really. The Council has far more important, more fundamental and some might even say, more influential issues to consider. You'd be amazed what the Party is planning'.

With that tantalising piece of news the Leader smiled, shook Dick's hand firmly again and grasped his shoulder looking him squarely in the face once more. 'Vera knows about this meeting but with everything we do here, discretion is of paramount importance. I'm sure we'll continue our discussion about the Council but do not repeat a word of our meeting to anyone'.

Dick really wanted to say something like, 'What, not even to Taylor?'. But he didn't. Instead he said, 'I won't sir. You can trust my discretion'.

With that, the doors opened and a different Party official escorted Dick out, through the ante ante-chamber, back through the ante-chamber and all the way back to the lobby where another car was waiting to take him back to the Ministry.

Back in the Grand Room the Leader turned to Carter.

'We must watch Mr. Brunel closely. Something still bothers me about him, but I'm not sure what it is. I have that feeling again. There's that same disturbance in the Fabric'.

Carter smirked inwardly then answered. 'Sir, if you have doubts about him then why take the risk of even considering appointing him to the Council?'

'Because, Carter', the Leader explained, 'I believe in the old adage 'Keep your friends close but your enemies closer''. He paused for a moment. 'And possible enemies of the state, even closer still'.

CHAPTER 25

The Resistance's first contact with David Parnell was made very subtly. It had already been established that he lived alone in a South London terraced house so a small envelope posted through his door late one night wouldn't attract any unnecessary attention from an inquisitive partner. The envelope contained two things: a fresh red carnation and a note that said Parnell been identified as a possible member of the Resistance, and that if he was interested in learning more then he should wear the flower as a buttonhole when he left for work the next morning. Taylor's biggest concern was that Parnell wouldn't believe the note was genuine. If he really thought he was being set up by the Party to check his loyalty then he would probably just ignore the note completely and therefore end any chance of meeting with the Resistance. On the other hand, if Parnell believed the note was genuine, then this was his first opportunity to meet fellow dissenters. In Taylor's experience, most wannabe Resistance members were so anti-Party that they were willing to take such a risk and disregard any doubts about the authenticity of the note.

The Resistance knew David left his house for work at about seven o'clock so Edward had been waiting covertly outside since half six. Wearing a dark grey raincoat and carrying an old battered leather briefcase, David left the house on time and passed right in front of Edward without even knowing it. No flower. Edward's heart sank. He called Taylor and delivered his coded message of disappointment, then set off for work himself, following David to the station. Less than a minute later David suddenly stopped then turned round and set off back home at a quick pace. Edward was puzzled and decided to follow David from a discrete distance, observing him unlock the front door and go back inside. A few moments later he reappeared carrying a smaller holdall, something he'd obviously forgotten. He passed Edward for a second time, this time walking even more briskly so he didn't miss his train. As he rushed by, Edward caught sight of a flash of red; the carnation that had been hurriedly pinned to his lapel. Edward reached for his phone again. This time he had good news to relay.

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From that initial contact the recruitment process was fast. Several blindfolded visits by David Parnell to the resistance HQ for lengthy interviews indicated that with his Party contacts, he would be an ideal

asset for the Resistance. It was during one of these interviews that Susan caught Dick alone in the lounge, sipping a glass of brandy and staring blankly into the fire.

'What's wrong?', she asked.

'Nothing', Dick said.

'Nothing as in 'I'm not jealous about the potential new recruit?'

Shit! Shit! Shit! Shit! Shit! Dick knew Susan had shared Alice's uncannily accurate insight. What is it about women?, he thought. Did they share some form of hive mind with collective intuition?

'Potential new recruit?, He's almost a fully-fledged resistance member isn't he?', Dick asked, still staring into the dancing flames.

'Not yet', Susan told him. 'His recruitment has been fast-tracked but there's still some final security checks and double checks to be carried out before he's admitted here and his blindfold comes off'.

Dick grunted his disapproval. Susan crouched down next to him and gently turned his head to face hers.

'Look, as far as defeating the Party goes you're still our best bet. No resistance member has met the Leader before. He seems to have taken a shine to you. The invitation to join the Party as an advisor is unbelievable!'

'So if I'm your best bet why is Taylor so hung up on hiring the newbie?'. Without waiting for Susan to respond Dick revealed the answer. 'It's because he feels guilty for failing to identify Benjamin as a subversive. Worse than that, deep down he feels responsible in some way for his death'.

'That is complete and utter nonsense', protested Susan angrily.

'Is it? I think Taylor's over-compensating for his own shortcomings by speeding up Mr. Parnell's induction and in the process he's compromising our safety. *All* our safety!'.

Susan stood up. 'That is not true! Mr. Parnell is being recruited because we need as many opportunities as we can to get inside the Party'.

'But what better chance is there than me? I've met the Leader and he almost offered me a job. I can't see anyone else in the Resistance achieving that in a hurry!'.

'You're unbelievable!', snapped Susan, now visibly annoyed and becoming angrier by the moment. 'You don't want Parnell to join because you're worried he'll discover something about the weapon that you haven't. He'll show you up and undermine your position as "number one infiltrator". You're just thinking about your own glory. I don't think I've met anyone so selfish or conceited!'.

What had started out as an angry outburst was quickly developing into a full-on row. Now it was Dick's turn for an outburst.

'Face it Susan, there's no more proof now about a weapon than

when I first arrived. It's all conjecture and hearsay. In fact, I'm beginning to think there's actually no weapon. That's right, it's all a big lie. A myth perpetuated by Taylor to reinforce his position as leader'.

'That's absolutely ridiculous, and you know it!', shouted Susan.

'Is it?', asked Dick, before launching into his best impersonation of Taylor, which to be honest was not that good, being far too camp.

'Look at me everyone, I'm Taylor the resistance leader', Dick mimicked. 'No one questions my authority because I'm so tall and well-spoken and smoke a pipe. I've got the most important job here, co-ordinating the plans to locate the secret weapon. The weapon? You didn't know about it? That's because it's a secret. Top-secret? No, make that 'above top-secret'. It's so secret that no one has heard anything about it — not even the fucking Party'.

Susan slapped Dick's face hard. 'A few minutes ago', she said, 'I came in and saw you sitting here, illuminated by the glow of the fire. I felt extremely aroused and thought we might make love later. Well you and your arrogant sense of self-importance have managed to turn me completely off that particular thought!'

'I can't believe you're throwing away the chance to have sex with me!' Dick responded.

'You're absolutely unbelievable!' Susan continued her rant. 'Again, you only think about yourself! You may have a large penis but I know one thing that's bigger. Your ego! Believe me, Mr. Longg I'll still have sex tonight, but just not with you!'

Dick was hurt. Not only had his self-esteem been damaged, but he'd also just thrown away the chance of a quick lay. He dealt with situations like this in the best way he knew.

'Well you're crap in bed anyway!'

Susan shot him a steely glare and stormed out at the precise moment that Edward, Taylor and Alice walked into the lounge. Standing next to them in the doorway she turned to face Dick and shouted, 'Well your penis curves to the left!'.

Dick hoped that was the end of her outrage but he was wrong.

'Bendy cock!', Susan yelled before slamming the door behind her.

Dick made his excuses to Taylor and his colleagues and also left the lounge. Insulting him was one thing, but insulting his penis was quite another. And anyway, it was only a very slight curvature and totally within normal medical limits.

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Jack's final victim had been terminated the previous evening near

to Aldgate. The killing was as sensational and gruesome as his previous murders. This particular harlot was found sliced from neck to navel, wearing her intestines wrapped around her neck like a scarf, albeit a scarf that was slimy and very smelly. Given the large number of victims and the duration of this campaign Dick was extremely satisfied to see that the story still made front page news. The media and public still retained an active interest in the crimes, although this now caused a dilemma; how to maintain this interest now all the harlots had been terminated. This was an issue that Dick had anticipated. Rather than have Jack killed by an upstanding member of the public as he'd previously contemplated, Dick made arrangements to have him taken out of the field and returned 'to base'. Party technicians had wanted to scrap him but Dick was insistent that Jack be powered-down and just kept in storage. After all, who knew if his skills would be required in the future.

With Jack out of action Dick had to ensure that the public were reminded from time to time about the dangers of prostitution, in the sense that if you were a harlot you were firstly, a morally-defective deviant and secondly, you were very likely to be murdered in a grisly fashion without your consent. Dick needed to affect this in a way that required little input from him personally but which created the same level of publicity. A decommissioned Jack posed no problems. The media would still report future, more sporadic murders – but of course, they'd all be faked. There would be no killer and no victims – just realistic reports and photographs that would be distributed to the media through the normal news channels. Even eyewitness accounts would be faked. The police officers and the witnesses, in fact anyone involved in the reports, would be fictitious.

For the media trying to investigate the crimes, trying to locate these people would be so time-consuming and wrapped-up in red tape that they wouldn't bother. The easiest option was to take the story as provided and run it. Dick knew this would work because in his experience most journalists were lazy hacks who just wanted stories delivered to them on a plate; chasing them was just too damn hard. He was sure this work ethic, or lack of it, was ingrained in all journalists' DNA so it would likely exist in the future as well. And he was right. (Naturally, what Dick thought of journalists excluded book reviewers who, as everyone knows, are a breed apart; hard-working, discerning, conscientious, diligent, objective professionals who are as good-looking as they are intelligent).

Dick prepared a large number of these reports of future killings with all the relevant supporting information and devised a schedule to drip-feed these stories into the media over a long period of time. He didn't worry that the stories might eventually be relegated to the

second half of the newspapers or the part of broadcast news that began, ‘And finally…’ He, and of course, the Party just wanted the murders to be reported on a regular basis.

It had been another long day in the office when Dick finally finished his summarising report on Project Gladstone and handed it to Vera. As usual, they were the last two people remaining. Vera took the folder, flicked through it then put it down on her desk, tears welling-up in her eyes. As she dabbed them with a delicate lace handkerchief more sobs came. Dick looked up. More sobs. Then more still. Soon Vera was trembling. Dick didn’t know what to do. He was used to women crying tears of joy but these sorts of tears just made him feel very awkward. Instinctively he put his arms around Vera and cradled her head on his chest, pleased the roles weren’t reversed otherwise he’d surely suffocate.

‘I’m so pleased that Jack’s been a success’, Vera said between sobs. ‘And I’m so sad too’.

‘Sad? Why?’ Dick asked, patting Vera’s ample back.

‘Because of this’. Vera took the handkerchief away from her face and pulled back slightly from Dick so she could retrieve an open envelope from her desk. She reburied her face in his chest and more tears came. Dick kept one arm around her and with the other, took the envelope from her and shook loose its contents, a brief, very official-looking letter. By now Vera was crying so much her whole body was shaking and this made the letter extremely difficult to read. A few keys words caught Dick’s eye, but these were the only words he needed to see: ‘appointment’, ‘Ruling’, ‘Council’ and ‘forthwith’. He liked all these words, particularly the last one. He’d been desperately hoping for this new appointment ever since the Leader first mentioned it but wasn’t sure if it was an empty promise or a genuine opportunity. Now it was real, and far, far sooner than he had hoped.

Dick saw himself putting each foot on the rungs of achievement as he climbed the ladder of success. That was in the very near future. In the very near present he had to calm Vera down so he could go home, leaving the office and her, forever. He gently pushed Vera away so he could see her face. Her eyes were red raw, tears had completely smeared her blusher and there was a stream of grey green mucous seeping out of one nostril.

‘I need to tell you something before you leave’, Vera sniffed. ‘Something I’ve been keeping from you. Something I have to say but which must remain forever our secret’.

Dick really wanted to say his final goodbyes and leave. He really didn’t want to hear another pledge of undying love, especially from someone whose face was rapidly resembling a creature from a straight-to-DVD horror film.

‘Benjamin was completely loyal to the Party’.

‘Pardon?’ Dick couldn’t believe what he was hearing.

‘He was framed for his crimes’, explained Vera.

Dick was stunned by this revelation. ‘H-how do you know?’

‘Because it was me who implicated him’.

Dick wanted to ask a hundred questions, well maybe not a hundred, but lots of them, but he didn’t need to.

‘I planted the damning evidence on him one night and then tipped-off the security forces’. Vera snorted like a wild boar, siphoning the mucous up one nostril like dirty water disappearing into a plughole. Ordinarily this would have made Dick recoil in horror but at this moment he didn’t care. He was hooked by Vera’s confession.

‘He was making my life very difficult’, she continued. ‘You remember I had private talks with him in the meeting room; well it was Benjamin who requested them. He told me you were a traitor and that I was covering for you. He said he’d use his party contacts to gather proof and expose the truth. I told him he was talking claptrap and that if he continued to waste my time I’d have to discipline him and that would not look very good on his permanent record’.

In a most unlady-like way Vera wiped her face with the back of her large hand before continuing. ‘That’s when he told me he came in very early one morning and found me asleep at my desk. It was the morning after I got drunk. The little bastard took the brandy bottle from the waste bin and put it in my hand before taking photographs and leaving, returning after I’d gone home. He said he was going to blackmail me unless I resigned so he could take my place and unmask you! My job is my life Jeremy. I couldn’t face losing my job… or you!’ Vera burst out crying again, burying her head in Dick’s chest. ‘And now you’re leaving anyway!’ Vera was now sobbing uncontrollably. Dick tried to give her a comforting hug but the wide expanse of her back meant he couldn’t quite manage to get his hands to meet. Only by breathing in could he even get his fingertips to touch.

‘I’ll take that with me to the grave Vera. Thank you for everything. I won’t forget you. No matter where I end up, I’ll always keep in touch’. Dick knew this was a complete and utter lie but it seemed an appropriately reassuring and consoling thing to say.

‘Good luck Jeremy!’ Vera wailed. ‘Now go! I don’t want you to see me this way!’.

She broke out of his grasp and Dick took one last look at her swollen, red, mucous-ridden face and had to agree with her sentiment. Leaving his identity pass on his desk he left the room without looking back. Taking the elevator to the ground floor, Dick said goodnight to the security guard in the lobby and walked out of the Ministry of Information for the very last time. In the cool night air Dick re-read

the letter in detail. It confirmed that his new position took effect tomorrow and that he should report to the Party Headquarters at 0800. Dick decided to walk home that night, thinking about his future with a smile on his face. It was only a few weeks ago that he arrived in this strange world and now, here he was, relishing the no-doubt painful death of his ex-colleague and about to become a trusted advisor to the Leader.

Dick's promotion to the Ruling Council didn't just give him a new opportunity to gather information; it gave him a new impetus and motivation. Dick was determined to find out about this so-called secret weapon once and for all, and before David Parnell. He thought about Parnell's entry to the Resistance being expedited by Taylor and smirked. 'Fast tracked?', he thought to himself. 'You don't know the meaning of the fucking word'.

CHAPTER 26

Dick underwent the usual identity checks when he reported to the Party headquarters the following morning but before he was allowed past security, he was asked to sign an NDA. Dick thought this was a very unusual request. Sure, the Nude Disability Act of 2003 had been worthy legislation that made it illegal to discriminate against disabled porn stars, and which made it possible for actors like John 'Limpy' Large and 'Paraplegic' Tiffany Titts to forge niche careers for themselves, but Dick didn't see why it was relevant to him or his new job. Then he realised what he was being asked to sign was in fact a Non Disclosure Agreement, and that made far more sense.

This declaration stated that he would not reveal his new responsibilities or any aspect of his job to anyone. The document was worded so strongly that Dick was intimidated just scanning the text and felt threatened at the turn of every page. Dick expected that these restrictions would last forever, but discovered they actually existed in perpetuity, and that was a very, very, very long time indeed. The document didn't actually state what would happen if he did break his pledge and Dick didn't ask as he knew it would almost certainly be something that involved a long, lingering, agonising death. Dick signed the NDA and waited in the lobby, looking up at the trees and counting the squirrels scampering about. He'd just got up to eighteen, although he was concerned he may have counted the same particularly energetic one three times, when he heard his name being called in a monotone.

'Mr. Brunel?'

An unremarkable looking man in his late forties approached. 'I'm Stanley Carrington. Welcome to the Party headquarters. I've been appointed as your mentor'.

Nearly everything about Stanley was dull; his voice, his clothes, his posture, his handshake – and especially his name. The only thing about him not dull was his moustache, a fanciful waxed effort which proved Dick's unwritten 'Law of Facial Hair' that stated that the extent of extroverted facial hair was in inverse proportion to the personality of the wearer. Stanley escorted Dick to a glass elevator and pushed a button marked 'ten'. The voice of the elevator announcing the floors as they ascended had more personality than Stanley.

'So, the Ruling Council's on the tenth floor?', asked Dick.

'No. It's not on any floor', Stanley said in his dull way. 'The existence of the Ruling Council is a secret and so is its composition. Members are spread across the whole building. They all have different job titles as a cover for their real roles'.

‘So what’s my job going to be?’, enquired Dick.

‘Assistant to the Deputy Assistant Under Secretary for Legislative Administration Ratification’.

Dick was disappointed. He wanted the prestige of being able to tell people, especially girls, that he was a member of the Ruling Council. That would have been impressive. It was a job title, Dick felt, which would make doors open and knickers drop.

‘Why that particular position?’ Dick said, trying to hide the considerable disappointment in his voice.

‘Because it’s so bland and innocuous that no one will bother to ask further questions about your work’, Stanley explained.

As the doors to the elevator opened on to the tenth floor Dick knew he was right. He couldn’t foresee anyone who he told about his job ever saying to him, ‘Wow, that must be interesting’ or ‘No way! That’s my dream career!’

Stanley showed Dick his office in the Legislative Administrative Ratification Department and helped him settle in. It was an office well-suited to an Assistant to the Deputy Assistant Under Secretary. Not too big and not too small, with office furniture that was not too grand and not too functional. Sitting down for the fist time Dick found his chair wasn’t too hard and wasn’t too soft. It was, Dick thought, the office that Baby Bear would have loved — if the Three Bears had been corporate animals.

With the door closed to prevent their conversation being heard Stanley spent almost the whole day, including the lunch hour, giving Dick a comprehensive induction about the remit and politics of the Council, its history, all of its very many protocols and of course, its membership. Throughout, Dick wore a rictus grin which didn’t slip even when Stanley, who had been a member for two years, droned on in intricate detail about all office procedures including lunch breaks, tea breaks, dress code (including Formal Fridays), disciplinary procedures, holiday bookings, sickness reporting and all the complexities of stationery ordering with particular reference to the new forms HB5546b and 2B662289 that had just been introduced for the requisition of pencils. Dick was super keen to get started and wanted to meet his colleagues on the Council and begin making decisions. That’s why he was extremely disappointed to learn that the next Council meeting was half a day away, on Wednesday afternoon.

‘What do I do in the meantime?’, Dick asked, knowing that this society despised idleness and he wouldn’t be allowed to sit in his office throwing scrunched up paper into his waste bin or doing online Suduko (not that this was possible).

‘Each Council member belongs to one or two committees; usually areas they have a keen interest in’, Stanley explained. ‘These

committees are tasked with reviewing specific issues and devising the proposals that the whole Council will then consider. I, myself, serve on the Technology Committee but here's the entire list.'

Stanley handed Dick an alphabetical list of committees that Dick worked his way down: Agriculture, Architecture, The Arts, Bridges, Canals, Culture, Diet, Engineering, Education… He got bored at Housing and had all but lost interest at Museums. Dick yawned inwardly and scanned down the names to see if there was a committee on Secret Weapons. There wasn't of course, but where it would have been on the list, another committee caught his eye. Security.

'That's the one', Dick said with great conviction. 'That's the committee I was born to be on. Count me in!'

'Really? That's very good to hear', said Stanley, adding in his inimitable dull way, 'And you feel you can make a useful contribution to this committee?'

'Yes. Definitely', said Dick nodding enthusiastically, before giving his mentor an inquisitive look and asking 'What exactly do they do?'

Stanley explained that the security committee dealt with threats against the State, from individuals or organisations, and how these could be identified and dealt with. Dick knew that combating the resistance movement must be a major part of that committee's remit. Once Dick was in, he could find out exactly what they knew about the group and what steps they were planning to take against it.

'I'll inform the head of the committee of your interest and she'll make contact with you', Stanley advised. 'Now', he said, leaning conspiratorially towards Dick. There are some rather special fringe benefits in working here that I'm sure will interest you. Stanley handed Dick a sheet of paper containing another list.

'What's this?', Dick sighed. 'Sub-committees I have to choose from?'

'No', Stanley smiled. 'Something more enjoyable and completely different. It's a list of special evening classes offered free to senior Party members. Pastimes and hobbies to stimulate the mind and body or to help you relax and unwind. The current Leader introduced this concept when he came to power as a sort of compensation for the long hours, dedication and secrecy expected of us. A happy Party member, is, he says, a productive Party member'.

Dick continued to scan the paper. It might as well have been a list of diseases to infect yourself with. Compared to these extra curricular activities laid out before him he would have preferred beri-beri to ballroom dancing and cholera to callisthenics.

'I'll have to get back to you on this', Dick sighed, pocketing the list. 'Tell me Stanley, what floats your boat?'

Stanley frowned.

‘You know. What turns you on?’

No response. Dick sighed. ‘What leisure activity do you participate in?’

‘Brass rubbing’. Stanley’s eyes lit up at he told Dick about the joys of monumental brasses. He waxed lyrically about using a wax crayon to take tracings but Dick’s concentration had by now wandered. There were a number of types of rubbing that Dick enjoyed but brass definitely wasn’t one of them.

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Early the next morning Dick met the head of the Security Committee, a jolly middle-aged matronly woman called Enid Sharpe who used words like ‘spiffing’ and ‘righty-oh’, and called him a ‘clever chap’. She was someone, Dick thought, more suited to serving on the Knitting and Embroidery Committee (if this existed) than on one dealing with the safety and protection of the Party and everything it stood for. Enid welcomed Dick on board and gave him a very brief overview of her group’s activities. She didn’t go into detail about individual projects as she said these would be reviewed at the Council meeting later, but she briefed him on his first task.

This was when Dick realised that serving on the security committee was not the thrilling, glamorous post he hoped it would be. In fact if his first assignment had been typical, the post would not be thrilling or glamorous by any stretch of the imagination. His task was to wade through reams and reams and reams of transcribed telephone calls from citizens who had been identified as potential anti-Party activists. The Party’s suspicions were solely based on certain phrases used in their telephone conversations that they believed might be code words for subversive activities. Dick learned that someone else on the Security Committee had begun devising this list of these phrases and his job was to investigate the patterns and look for incriminating evidence in these calls.

Dick couldn’t wait for Enid to leave his office so he could start. He wanted to see if any of these so-called anti-Party activists were resistance members he knew, but then he remembered he didn’t actually know the real names of anyone in the Resistance, so this was pointless. After a very short while Dick also identified something else that was pointless. The whole exercise. It soon became obvious that whoever had begun to identify these so-called suspect phrases was an over-zealous, paranoid idiot. It was extremely doubtful that the phrase ‘piano tuning’ was in any way ambiguous; it related to the tuning of pianos and was not a code for the kidnapping of senior Party

members. Likewise, it was also very, very, very likely that 'lawn tennis' referred to a racquet game and was in no way related to a planned bombing of a police station. After several monotonous hours looking for evidence of anti-Party behaviour, Dick truly wished he were Assistant to the Deputy Assistant Under Secretary for Legislative Administration Ratification.

Mercifully, Wednesday afternoon soon came around, as did the opportunity for Dick to join his first Ruling Council meeting which took place in the Grand Room where he'd first met the Leader. All the Council members were seated around the large polished table with the Leader situated at the end, furthest from Dick. Carter, as usual, stood alert at his side.

'Ladies and gentlemen', the Leader said in his strong, rich voice. 'Before I open the meeting today I'd first like to introduce the newest member of our Ruling Council, the man behind Jack, the destroyer of the rogue harlots'. All eyes turned to Dick and he felt himself blushing. 'In his short time working at the Ministry of Information,' the Leader continued, 'He has demonstrated a commitment and allegiance to the Party second to none. But the fact of the matter is…'. At this point the Leader hesitated and looked directly at Dick, 'He shouldn't really be in this room at all'.

This was the cue for the audience to look confused and for Dick to turn a deeper shade of red, not from the praise, but from increased blood pressure. Was *this* the moment he was going to be exposed? After an uncomfortable silence the Leader continued. 'And the reason he shouldn't be here is purely a selfish one. I don't want him tied up in bureaucracy. I want him developing the next "Jack"; another great invention that will assist the Party! Ladies and gentlemen, please give a very warm welcome to Jeremy Brunel!'

To Dick's enormous relief the Leader started the applause and was immediately joined by his colleagues. After this warm welcome the other Council members introduced themselves one by one in the manner of a self-help group ('Hello, my name is Ian. I've been advising the Leader on public architecture for three years…'). Dick's colleagues were all very welcoming and friendly. It was a real mix of people, mainly men but a few women, with a wide spread of ages although it was evident that Dick was the youngest. The Council members came from all types of backgrounds and all sorts of careers. In fact there was actually little they had in common, apart from an overwhelming and overzealous desire to serve the Party.

The whole ambience of the meeting wasn't one you'd associate with a gathering of influential representatives of a police state. There was tea and coffee, several plates of carefully arranged digestive biscuits placed at regular intervals along the table, and everyone had

lined paper and a sharpened pencil. The meeting started with apologies for absence, a look at the agenda, the reading of minutes from the last session and then a summary of the agreed action points. Once this part of the meeting was successfully concluded each of the committee heads reviewed their current projects and initiatives.

Despite the amount of information being conveyed on a multitude of different subjects the Leader maintained a keen interest throughout, offering insightful comments from time to time. Since this was Dick's first meeting, all the issues discussed were brand new to him. There was little of worth he could contribute but he made numerous notes in case there was anything of interest he could report back to Taylor.

Eventually it was Enid's turn to report. She brought up the matter of the phone call analysis and said that it was inconclusive and that further investigation was needed. Dick moaned inwardly, thinking of yet more transcripts he'd have to analyse. What suspect words and phrases would he have to look for this time? 'Picnic in the park' or 'Feeding the ducks'? Enid also updated everyone about a new recruitment campaign for the security forces, a review of interrogation techniques and the procurement and installation of additional CCTV cameras cunningly concealed within ornamental lampposts. These were all interesting to hear about, but not that significant. Then Enid mentioned something about 'Operation Trojan Horse'.

'Ah, yes', the Leader enquired. 'How is Mr. Parnell?'

The tea Dick was drinking at the time went down the wrong hole. Or both holes at once. He wasn't sure but it didn't matter; the effect was the same. He choked and spluttered simultaneously. With everyone staring at him, Dick wiped his watering eyes and apologised. As he took another sip to calm his nerves, Enid replied.

'Very well. He reports that he's about to be officially accepted into the Resistance. His blindfold comes off tonight'.

Dick's next sip of tea also went down the wrong hole, but this time he didn't cause as much of a scene; his spluttering was drowned out by the sound of the Council members loudly applauding.

'Splendid!', announced the Leader over the sounds of approval. 'And is he quite certain his identity has not been compromised?'

'Definitely', Enid said proudly. 'In all of his meetings with the Resistance leadership there has been absolutely no indication that they are aware of his true identity'. Enid turned to address the rest of the Council. 'They seem to have accepted him and his fake background on face value from the very first time they noticed the news story we planted. There is a real eagerness, in fact, over-eagerness, to have him on board'.

'And do we know where the Resistance operate from?' asked a skinny, pale-looking man who headed the Cultural Committee.

‘No’, answered Enid. ‘As we thought, although the resistance movement is small it is surprisingly technologically proficient. From his initial meetings, Mr. Parnell learned they have various electronic counter-measures in place to avoid detection. Alerted to this fact, it was obvious that he would be unable to conceal any tracking devices on subsequent visits’.

‘Then how can we ever discover their headquarters?’, asked the skinny, pale-looking man. ‘How can we raid it, arrest the members and interrogate them?’

‘That is now not the prime objective’, answered the Leader before Enid had a chance to speak. ‘From even the few meetings he has had so far, Mr. Parnell has gleaned sufficient knowledge of the Resistance’s plans and capabilities. There is no more to learn; that means his mission has changed’.

Dick wondered what he meant by ‘sufficient knowledge’? Taylor had been a fool to even admit Parnell without sufficient checks but even he wouldn’t have told him all about the movement’s plans so soon… would he?

‘Why weren’t we told about the new mission?’ asked Stanley Carrington who up until now had been silent, and after asking this question, probably wished he’d remained that way.

The Leader crashed his fist down on the polished table with such force that every saucer simultaneously leapt off the table, every cup simultaneously leapt out of its saucer and the milk jug fell over. With this sudden, violent move, the Leader now had everyone’s rapt attention.

‘Because I changed the plan, Mr. Carrington, that is why!’, the Leader shouted. The way he shouted those ten words made everyone in the room fully aware of his unquestionable, supreme authority. ‘And do you have a problem with that?’, he enquired, slightly more calmly.

A nervous Stanley stammered out half an answer. ‘N-no, sir. I j-just thought…’

‘Well don’t!’ shouted the Leader. ‘Although we were unable to locate the actual headquarters Mr. Parnell gained considerable information from his incursions and he has been issued with new orders’. The Leader nodded towards Enid who continued on his behalf.

‘Mr. Parnell’s role has changed from being that of a spy to that of an assassin’, she said calmly.

Dick was too shocked to even fart. He knew Taylor had been wrong to take such a cavalier attitude towards the recruitment of Parnell. Ordinarily he’d take immense pleasure in knowing he’d been right. Now though, Dick was so shaken and scared he found himself temporarily devoid of any emotions.

As if he needed to justify his decision, which he really didn't, the Leader explained the thinking behind his plan. 'Groups like this traditionally have a top heavy chain of command with a very strong leader and usually just a couple of second lieutenants. Destroy the people at the very top and you destroy the whole group. Cut off the head and the tail will die!'.

'How are you going to cut off their heads?', asked an anonymous-looking woman seated three places to Dick's left who had something or other to do with food production.

'It's a figure of speech', sighed the Leader. 'Mr. Parnell will use a prototype weapon to destroy the leadership; a miniature laser pistol that's been fashioned out of a new ceramic material. We're certain the Resistance scanners won't be able to detect it'.

'Ironically', the Leader added, smiling, 'Given Mr. Parnell's training and the weapon's firepower, the Resistance is unlikely to put up much resistance'.

What made this disturbing remark even more chilling was the fact that it was addressed directly at Dick. Or at least, that's how it seemed. Dick gave a nervous laugh and smiled back. Taylor had been right. There *was* a secret weapon after all but it wasn't a thing; it was a he. The rest of the Council meeting was a blur. Updates on hospital building, the proposed introduction of a new school syllabus, new social housing initiatives and public fundraising for a new wing of the Natural History Museum. All this information washed over Dick; he was too distracted to take any of it in. All he could think about was the impending deaths of his colleagues. He remembered the dream when he first arrived. Of trying to escape from infiltrators in his room and stumbling over the dead bodies of his colleagues lying in the corridor and in the lounge. Except this hadn't just been a dream. It was a premonition. Dick was still lost in his thoughts about the impending slaughter of his colleagues at the hand of this trained killer when he became aware of someone addressing him loudly.

'Mr. Brunel. Mr. Brunel!'.

Startled, Dick looked up to see Enid staring at him. 'Are you all right? You were lost in your thoughts'.

Around him, Dick's Ruling Council colleagues were packing their papers up and drifting out of the room. Dick looked at the end of the table but the Leader was nowhere to be seen.

'I'm fine', said Dick, lying in the same unconvincing way that a dwarf might say, 'I'm tall'.

'It's just that I'm suffering a bit from information overload', he told Enid.

'I know', she said, sympathetically. 'I was just like you on my first day. So much to take in. News about this. News about that. Updates,

reviews and proposals! I saw you taking lots of notes which is splendid! Let it all sink in. Mull it over and you'll be able to make sense of it all!'

At this moment in time there was only one thing that Dick wanted to make sense of. 'That 'Operation Trojan Horse'', Dick asked, 'What a great idea. Did you think it up?'

'Alas, no', Enid commented. 'It came from the Leader. Who else could think of such a cunning and ruthless plan?'

'Who indeed?', said Dick nodding. 'And when do you think this Mr. Parnell will start his killing?'

'Tonight, of course', Enid answered. 'After all, there's no time like the present, is there?'.

'I suppose not', sighed Dick with an air of deep dismay and even deeper panic. He said goodbye to Enid and returned alone to his office to consider his next course of action. Glancing out of the window on the way back the grey overcast skies reflected his own sombre mood.

CHAPTER 27

The first thing Dick did was to get a sheet of paper and pen so he could work out a strategy. Actually, the first thing Dick did was to pull the blinds on the inner windows of his office to main a degree of privacy; not too closed that it might give the impression that he was masturbating furtively under his desk, but just shut enough that he could focus on his plans without too many distractions.

Dick decided to approach the situation logically. At the top of the paper he wrote his main objective: *'Warn Taylor and colleagues about Parnell'*. Underneath that Dick wrote a number of different methods to achieve that objective. Except he didn't, and that was because he couldn't.

Taylor's insistency on complete anonymity when it came to names, home or work addresses meant there was absolutely no way Dick could make contact with any of his resistance colleagues. Not Taylor, Alice, Susan, Edward, Humphrey, George, Clifford, Grace or anyone. Plus, he wasn't due to meet them again until the following week and by then it would be far too late.

Dick looked at the piece of paper again. He was still staring at it, searching for inspiration that he knew would never come, when the phone rang. It was Stanley reminding him that a table had been booked for eight o'clock that evening. Shit! Dick had completely forgotten about this. He'd been invited out by his Ruling Council colleagues to a sort of 'welcome aboard' dinner. At a time like this the last thing he felt like doing was socialising with a group of people implicit in the impending murder of his friends. Dick looked at his watch. It was nearly half past five and it was all going terribly wrong. Almost as a portent of the doom that was fast approaching there was a loud crash of thunder and the heavens opened. The rain was so sudden and so heavy that Dick walked over to his window to see the pavements below suddenly awash with water and people scurrying to find shelter.

From Dick's position the umbrellas suddenly appearing ten floors below resembled spring flowers bursting into bloom under the downpour. He watched more and more umbrellas open and that's when a thought hit Dick as suddenly and as powerfully as the bolt of lightning that arced down from the clouds. This was the time when the visual processing, memory and reasoning functions of Dick's brain all worked together for the common good. Usually these parts of Dick's brain functioned like the Three Stooges. This time they acted like the Three Musketeers.

With the second clap of thunder Dick rested his hands on the cold

glass of the window. He closed his eyes and thought himself back in the resistance library, being confronted by Taylor after the episode with Alice. Closing his eyes even tighter Dick tried to retrieve all the details of that awkward and embarrassing night from the depths of his memory. Another clap of thunder. There was Taylor framed in the open doorway. He and Alice quickly and ashamedly dressing. Then Dick, not knowing what to do, scooping a few things back into Alice's bag after he'd swiped it on to the floor in the heat of the moment. What were they? Dick concentrated like he'd never concentrated before and the objects slowly came into focus. Her tortoiseshell hairbrush. A small bottle of rose-scented perfume. A railway ticket and a plastic laminated card. He saw himself putting everything back in the bag and handing it to her. Wait! He remembered glancing at the card as he'd put it back. At the time he was so shocked by events that he didn't register the information but now he could see it; her ID badge for work. Closing his eyes as tightly as he could without making them haemorrhage Dick willed himself with every ounce of strength he possessed to remember the details on the card. A company name gradually took form: 'Liberty Parasols and Umbrellas'. Then a photograph of Alice and her name. Her real name. Margaret Tomkinson.

Another lightning bolt and a crash of thunder, the loudest yet, shook the building. Dick suddenly opened his eyes. Standing here, looking at the foreboding sky while the torrential rain continued outside, Dick experienced a brand new feeling; an epiphany. Some would call it his 'Road to Damascus' moment but Dick wouldn't have understood this reference, thinking it was the title of an old Bob Hope / Bing Crosby movie. This was the moment, the first time in Dick's life, when he thought of others before himself, and he knew exactly what needed to be done. He reached for his phone, called directory services to obtain the number of Alice's company, and then rang her.

'Margaret, it's me Jeremy Brunel. I need to see you right away'.

To say that Alice was surprised would be like saying that Dick was relieved. Not wanting to give anything away in case their phone calls were being monitored, Dick arranged to meet her at the Pelican Café, the scene of their first rendezvous. The overcast sky made the corner in which they were sitting even darker, perfect for their discrete meeting and the conversation that played out. Over glasses of tonic water Dick told Alice everything he knew and the immense danger that was imminent. Alice took it all in then sat back in her seat, looking at Dick through narrowed, suspicious eyes.

'I don't believe you'.

'What?!', Dick exclaimed, absentmindedly raising his voice and attracting unwanted attention from two elderly well-to-do women

sitting nearby.

'I think you're saying this because you're still jealous of this Mr. Parnell and because you want to make a fool of me and Taylor for what happened between us', Alice explained, crossing her arms across her chest, making her generous bosom even more prominent. There was a time and a place for this sort of pleasant diversion, thought Dick, and this was neither.

'Alice! You have to trust me! I'm telling you this so you can all take steps to protect yourselves. I'm doing this because I don't want any of you to be hurt. Parnell is a trained killer. He's carrying a new type of gun that can avoid detection and he's planning to use it!'.

Alice had the sort of expression that was halfway between someone who was very bored and someone who didn't care.

'You've got no proof at all, have you?', she asked.

'Actually I have', Dick told her. He fumbled around in both of his inside jacket pockets. 'I know it's here somewhere… where did I put it… it's a signed confession from David Parnell…' Alice's eyes registered astonishment.

'Of course I don't have proof!', Dick was raising his voice again and one of the elderly women tutted. He held Alice's hands and looked her straight in the eyes. 'I wasn't going to tell you this but I'm warning you, not just so you can save your skin, but because…' Dick hesitated and lowered his voice. 'I love you!'. Ignoring Alice's look of shock Dick continued. 'I'm not going to come between you and Taylor at all but you should know that I couldn't live with myself if anything happened to you, or any of the Resistance!'

Alice was stunned into silence.

'Listen to me carefully. This is what you must do…'

Dick outlined a detailed plan that she had to convey to Taylor. Throughout the instructions Alice remained wide-eyed, When Dick had finished she shook her head.

'Taylor will not agree to that', she told him.

'He has to!', Dick explained. 'You have to appreciate what needs to be done and convince him!'. Dick stole another glance at his watch. It was ten to eight and he barely had time to join his colleagues at the restaurant. 'Now I really do have to be going'. He leant forward and kissed Alice gently on each cheek, lingering so he could whisper, 'Remember, this is the only solution. Desperate times require desperate measures'.

Dick left the café, turning round one last time as he left to see an emotional, confused and apprehensive Alice. After momentarily collecting her thoughts, she too departed.

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Dick attended the dinner with his colleagues knowing there was nothing more he could do, apart from waiting. Well, apart from waiting and worrying. And suffering a series of anxiety attacks. The fate of his resistance colleagues lay in the hands of a mechanical woman who probably didn't believe him, and her very possessive and jealous lover who probably didn't trust him. Dick tried to relax but even the pre-dinner drinks failed to reduce his stress-levels while small-talk during the hors d'oeuvres similarly failed to take his mind off events. Dick was lost in his thoughts as a very smartly-dressed waiter wheeled a large silver tureen up to the table. With a theatrical flourish he removed the cover to reveal crispy duck in orange brandy source. Unknown to Dick, at the exact same moment in the resistance lounge, Susan was also removing something with an equally melodramatic gesture; David Parnell's blindfold. He was surrounded by fifteen or so resistance members, a good turn out for a wet Wednesday.

Once the loud applause had died down Taylor gave a short speech welcoming Mr. Parnell, commenting that he was pleased his recruitment process was now over and how it was an outstanding coup having him as a fully-fledged member of the Resistance. His turn to speak, David thanked everyone for making him feel at home and said he couldn't wait to use his inside knowledge of the Party against it. This was the cue for more clapping. As this petered out, Taylor announced a slight change to the order of the evening's proceedings. With his arm on David's shoulder Taylor spoke. 'The first part of our evenings traditionally deals with training, intelligence sharing, mission planning, those sort of things, while the second half is dedicated to some well-earned rest and relaxation. Well, partly in celebration of David becoming a full resistance member, and partly because I feel so bloody horny tonight, we're going to swap the evening around'. Everyone in the audience was surprised at this change in plans, but pleasantly so.

Addressing David, Taylor said, 'You know we practice free sex here, well I've arranged a sort of initiation as a way of thanking you for joining us. That way you can appreciate first-hand what loyal Party supporters are missing out on!'

When the whoops of delight from the audience subsided David said that while he was grateful for the offer, he really wanted to start work right away. Taylor would have none of it, however and while other members paired-up, he showed David into the main bedroom which had been illuminated by scented candlelight.

'One of the female members will be in shortly', Taylor said, 'to give you a lesson in love'. With that he gave David a wink and a friendly slap on the back. David shrugged, thinking he might as well

enjoy himself before the killing spree began. He undressed, carefully hiding the small ceramic pistol that had escaped detection in the middle of his folded clothes, and got into the soft bed. A few minutes later the door opened again. An attractive woman entered and walked over to him, dropping her silk robe to reveal her complete nakedness. David sighed and lay back with his hands clasped behind his head thinking that as sacrifices on behalf of the Party went, this was one of the least arduous. The woman pulled back the covers and climbed on to the bed, straddling him. David smiled some more. A woman taking control of the situation? This was a totally new experience and one that he was already beginning to enjoy. Lovemaking with his wife was predictable and boring, with all the sensuality of making love to a mackerel. He'd heard stories about different positions and sexual experimentation but had dismissed these as the most preposterous fiction or Resistance propaganda. Now it seemed, he was going to discover the truth.

As candlelight flickered over the full breasts of his lover she inched her way down David's body. Within moments he was fully aroused. Skilfully manoeuvring herself up and forwards, she gently lowered herself on to David who entered her with ease. He gasped and thrust his hips in time with the slow, rhythmic lovemaking which gradually picked up pace. The speed increased, slightly faster than David would have liked, but he wasn't going to complain. He did, however, think of saying something when what had started as a feeling of rapture changed into one of discomfort. Protests, gentle at first but then increasingly more vocal, fell on deaf ears as his lover ground her hips faster and faster like a woman possessed.

The more David complained, the more she increased her tempo until what was taking place on the bed was not so much lovemaking as something you'd witness at a rodeo. Soon David was awash with sweat. Despite his superior strength, pinned down by her weight and shaken by her constant thrusts, he couldn't dislodge the woman who was now grinding away, seemingly oblivious to his distress. A minute later and pleasure had all but changed into pain. Her speed had increased to such a degree that David was having difficulty breathing and he began to feel slightly nauseous. The friction between their groins became so severe that pubic hair started smouldering, giving off a very unpleasant singed odour. That alone would usually be enough to destroy any amorous mood but in David's case there was something else which spoiled the moment — the onset of blurred vision and the sudden tightening of his chest. The last thing he saw before his cardiac arrest was the face of his lover staring down at him. The cold, emotionless face of Alice. The face of someone who'd just shagged a man to death.

Taylor entered the room and hugged a sobbing Alice, comforting her after her ordeal. As she dressed he went through David's clothes, found the gun, then called Edward in to help him remove the body. They planned to dump it a long way away in woodland so it would be days or even weeks before it was discovered.

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When Dick returned home after his dinner he couldn't sleep, partly as a result of the very rich meal he'd eaten but mainly because of apprehension. He awoke in a sweat at about five, went for a walk to clear his head, and arrived at the office by half past seven. He was just sorting through his paperwork for the day when the phone rang.

'Jeremy?', a familiar female voice asked. 'It's Margaret'.

Dick hesitated. He didn't know anyone called Margaret. Then he remembered. 'Margaret!' he replied in amazement. She was still alive!

'I know I shouldn't call you at work but I wanted to say it was good meeting you yesterday evening. I passed your best wishes to my boss as well'.

'I see'. Dick said, being very economical with his comments in case Party agents were eavesdropping on the conversation. 'And how about your new colleague? How is he?'

'Not very well', Alice said. 'Not very well at all'.

Dick smiled. 'I'm sorry to hear that Margaret. Anyway, I'd better go as I have a full work schedule ahead of me today. I'll see you shortly'.

The call set the tone for the rest of the day. Dick had a spring in his step. He was happy wading through interminable telephone conversation transcripts. He was pleased to spend his lunch hour with Stanley who regaled him with tales about his latest brass-rubbings exploits. He even remained cheery during a three hour meeting in a small stuffy office with Enid discussing a possible curfew for the under sixteens in inner city areas. Dick was on such a high after the morning's good news that he knew it was only a matter of time before he found himself returning to earth with a bump. This did happen but the sensation was less 'coming back to earth with a bump' and more like being thrown out of an aircraft attached to an anvil, with another even bigger anvil attached to the first one. It happened at seven o'clock. Dick, who had been working late to finish the transcripts, yawned and stretched. He rose from his chair to put a file back on a shelf when someone called his name.

'Dick S. Longg'.

Dick's blood turned to ice. In fact it turned colder than ice. It

turned to liquid nitrogen. No one outside of the Resistance had called him by his real name since he'd first arrived in this future. And the fact it was a statement rather than a question indicated that the speaker had no doubt whom he was addressing. In the nano-second before he turned around Dick thought of the person he'd least like to see standing behind him. Surprisingly it wasn't the circus clown holding an axe, or a giant ghostly lobster called Jaques, both particular and irrational fears from his childhood. No. The person Dick least wanted to see standing there in his office saying his real name was, unfortunately, the person who was *actually* standing there. And he was holding a gun.

'I can't believe it's really you', said the Leader.

CHAPTER 28

A million thoughts went through Dick's head. Well OK, not a million of them. More like five. How? Why? Where? When? What?

'I thought you looked familiar the first time I met you'. The Leader gently shut the office door behind him and closed the blinds fully. Dick stood totally still, thinking back to their first meeting. He recalled the slightly surprised look on the Leader's face when they stared at each other and shook hands.

'Of course, I knew it couldn't be you. I mean, how could it?' The Leader was a few feet from Dick, the gun aimed squarely at his chest.

Dick listened in silence.

'But there was something not quite right about you. Something that didn't add up. I felt, well… a disturbance in the Fabric'.

Dick frowned.

The Leader continued. 'You wouldn't understand'.

'Is the fabric like 'The Force'?', Dick asked.

'Shhhhhhhh', hissed the Leader, looking furtively all around him before continuing. 'But the annoying thing was, although I had doubts about you I couldn't find anything to substantiate them. Whoever gave you your new identity is very clever. Very clever indeed. You stood up to the most robust security checks. We studied your background and the backgrounds of friends and colleagues. Again, there was nothing at all to arouse our suspicions. From time to time you seemed to disappear when we tried to track you, but again, that in itself didn't alert me to who you really are. I decided my instinct must be wrong which is why I invited you on to the Ruling Council'.

Dick decided he had to act fast. He looked at the Leader facing him, still holding the gun. He judged the distance between the two of them and looked down at the heavy hole-punch on his desk. Then he looked up once more at The Leader, staring him straight in the face. The Leader went to say something but just as he opened his mouth, Dick let fly.

'I think you're mistaken', he spluttered. 'My name is Jeremy Brunel!'.

Dick, along with most Party members, had never heard the Leader really laugh. It wasn't really in keeping with his personality as a ruthless politician or brutal leader. This time though, he let out a loud chuckle.

'Is that the best you can do, Dick?', the Leader smiled. 'I was expecting you to have least thrown that hole-punch at me'.

Doing that, Dick thought, would have just been admitting his identity and therefore his guilt. No, he was sure he could bluff his way

out of this mess. After all, many of his co-stars had complimented him on his smooth tongue.

'I think you're mistaking me for someone else', Dick said with as much conviction as he could muster. 'I'm Jeremy Brunel. I've never heard of this Dick S. Longg. Maybe I look like him, whoever he is, but I am most definitely not him'.

The Leader stroked his chin. 'Hmmmmmm', he said aloud. Stepping forward he lifted his gun and slowly ran the end of the barrel up Dick's left cheek then along his forehead, wiping away a large bead of sweat that had formed there. The Leader then used the weapon to trace the profile of Dick's nose and chin, studying his features intently. A second large bead of sweat formed. The gun moved slowly down Dick's chest. 'Well, you do definitely look like Dick Longg. And you sort of sound like him'. Dick didn't like where this conversation was going. And he definitely didn't like where the gun was going. It was now heading south of the equator, towards the inevitable destination of the Tropic of Penis.

'There's one way to settle the confusion once and for all', said the Leader as the gun reached Dick's fly.

Dick gulped. He then realised what was happening in the trouser department and gulped again. The Leader looked down and saw it too. Dick tried to prevent his erection from going any further but no matter how hard he tried, both the thought of sodomisation by Hulk Hogan and the truly frightening real-life threat of a shot to his penis failed to cool his ardour. The rubbing motion of the gun against the cloth of Dick's trousers turned a mere swelling into a prominent lump into an enormous bulge. The Leader took the gun away and smiled.

'Sit down Dick'. Dick did as he was told, relieved that the desk between him and the Leader would hide any further embarrassment. The Leader sat facing him and smiled.

'Aren't you remotely interested in how I finally realised your true identity?'

'But I'm Jeremy…'

'It was your penis'.

Dick stopped. The Leader didn't.

'My doubts about you were all but confirmed by David Parnell. One thing he learned from your colleagues was that they had managed, fairly recently, to get someone deep within the Party however they would not reveal who this person was, how it happened or where they were. Then I remembered that a short time ago, using stolen Party technology, one person travelled back to 2010 but two people came back. Two agents were dispatched to follow them but they failed to make a clear identification. You don't need to be a genius to work out that the person brought back was most probably

recruited by the Resistance to do their dirty work'.

Dick could only listen in shock as the Leader continued his explanation. 'This person seemed to go under cover at about the same time as you appeared on the scene at the Ministry of Information. I'm far too suspicious to believe in coincidences to I decided to probe deeper to try and uncover evidence of your duplicity'.

As Dick's anxiety levels reached 'Code Red' the Leader continued his explanation. 'We reviewed every single inch of video security footage you might have appeared in. There were eight teams on the project and they went back weeks and weeks looking for any clues, however small. Well, three days ago they eventually found that clue. And you know what? It wasn't small. It was in a video taken in your department at the Ministry of Information.'

'Fuck!', Dick thought. Then he thought some more, 'Fuck!' He knew there were cameras outside the entrance and in the lobby but he had no idea the actual offices and meeting rooms were all under video surveillance, and he doubted whether anyone else was aware of it.

The leader continued. 'Of course, when I said the footage featured 'you', I meant you and Vera. You remember that night don't you?', the Leader asked, smiling. 'Well, everything that took place was captured by the hidden security cameras. And I mean everything. You made quite a couple, or should that be quite a coupling?'

Dick choked; a combination of fear and the memory of that night in Meeting Room A. Being reminded of what happened was like someone opening-up an old wound. And squeezing lemon juice in it. Then vinegar. Then a bit of lime for good measure, then rubbing it with sandpaper before hitting it hard with a stick.

The Leader continued. 'That's when I thought, there's only one man I'm aware of with a twelve inch penis'.

'Thirteen…' Dick added, realising that setting the record straight was also tantamount to admitting his guilt.

'And that was Dick S. Longg, world famous porn star. Well, famous of course in his own world'.

'But if you realised my identity three days ago', asked Dick. 'Why the hell didn't you confront me then?'

'Well, since we had you under close observation I knew you wouldn't pose much of a threat, and I thought I could use the situation to my advantage', explained the Leader. 'I wanted to see whether you still had contact with the Resistance or whether you were in the field on your own. And of course, I wanted to see how you reacted to the news about David Parnell in the meeting. Your response was priceless!'. He smiled. 'And I hope you also enjoyed me toying with you in my little introduction. I like to have my little jokes'.

Dick was stunned.

‘Mr. Parnell failed to report in to us this morning’, continued the Leader. ‘I don’t doubt you have some knowledge about what happened to him’.

Dick shrugged his shoulders but in a way so unconvincing that he might just as well have said, ‘Of course I do’.

‘Come on, Dick’, said the Leader with a strange half-smile. ‘Just tell us. You’ve got nothing left to lose’.

‘What about my life?’, asked Dick.

‘Okay, apart from that’, agreed the Leader, adding, ‘Anyway, it’s probably a fair assumption to say that Parnell was killed by one of your colleagues, acting on your tip-off’.

‘And if he is dead’, asked Dick. ‘Then you happily consigned him to his fate just to prove I was still in contact with the Resistance?’

‘Well, yes’, the Leader answered. ‘What is the sacrifice of one man for the greater good of the Party?’

Dick shot the Leader a glare that said you’re a cruel, callous, cold-hearted, contemptible fucker (he would have used the other ‘C’ word to complete the alliteration but the publishers said they didn’t really want that word in this book).

Noticing Dick’s look of abhorrence, the Leader shook his head.

‘Dick. I’ve changed’, he said, adding earnestly, ‘I’m not the man you once knew’.

Dick frowned.

‘Look at me Dick. Look at me’. The Leader had placed the gun down on the desk near him and leaned towards Dick. ‘We know each other… Imagine me with short hair and without a beard and moustache’.

Dick looked. Nothing, but yet…

‘And thirty pounds lighter’.

Dick thought there *was* something slightly familiar about him. Then the Leader rolled up his shirt sleeve to reveal a tattoo of tape measure; one that neatly wound its way around his strong bicep.

‘Fuck’. Dick thought. It had been over a century since he’d seen that tattoo, but here it was, instantly recognisable.

‘It… It… It can’t be!’ Dick stammered. You’re… you’re…’

‘That’s right Dick…’ smiled the Leader.

‘Maxx Boner!’, Dick gasped.

‘The one and only!’, The Leader / Maxx replied.

Dick slumped back in his seat, the colour having drained from his face almost instantaneously. Being threatened by a loaded gun and then having your identity revealed was enough of a shock. Having it busted by your porn star rival from the past was enough to give anyone cardiac arrest. He thought back top his own time, to the day Maxx Boner suddenly and mysteriously disappeared from the industry.

At the time rumours about his disappearance were rife. Some said Maxx had been murdered by drug dealers or by the jealous boyfriend of an actress he was screwing on and off screen. Other stories were far more salacious. These included him being kidnapped and slain by a poorly-endowed serial killer, known by the FBI as 'Wee Willie Winkie' or suffering hideous shaft blisters when a cheap penile sheath he'd been wearing to increase his length had caused a chronic allergic reaction. And to think, all along he'd been living in the future.

'Fuck me!' Dick was still stunned at meeting up with his rival once again. 'Maxx Boner by name. Maxx Boner by nature'.

'Sadly no more'. The Leader said dolefully. 'Probably like you, my disappearance and my appearance here were so sudden I had no time to take the things most dear to me'.

'Like photographs of loved ones or childhood mementoes?', enquired Dick.

'No. My penile implant inflator and valve set', Maxx said with a dismayed expression.

So the rumours were true after all, Dick thought. Maxx *had* relied on artificial aids to sustain his erection and without his inflator he was like someone with… someone with… well, the best analogy he could think of was someone with a very long but very floppy penis.

'But couldn't you use the technology here to compensate?'

'That's what I thought', Maxx said. 'That notion… that promise… it's what kept me going. The then leader of the Resistance and his colleagues tried all sorts of methods but nothing worked. My erections either took too long to achieve or they were extremely painful. Usually both. And having to inflate your penis with a bicycle pump for forty minutes beforehand is guaranteed to kill any amorous moment stone dead.

'So, even under pressure you couldn't rise to the occasion?', Dick asked.

'I just wish the technology had been as clever as your witty word play', Maxx sighed. 'I had my doubts about using a compressed air line from the start, but I was assured it was safe'.

'My god. What happened?', asked Dick.

'The relief valve stuck…', Maxx grimaced at the memory that was obviously still fresh in his mind. 'Pressure build-up'. The rest of the words came slowly. 'Muscle torn…'

Dick winced.

'Testicle rupture…'

Dick crossed his legs.

'Shrapnel embedded in scrotum…'

Dick stuck his hands over his ears and went 'La, la, la, la, la, la'.

Maxx continued. 'There was nothing they could so. Going to a

public hospital was impractical. My injuries would have raised too many questions and my identity would have been compromised. The Resistance did the best they could to stem the blood loss and patch me up'.

Dick thought this was exactly the right moment to say words of encouragement. The problem was, he couldn't think of any. Dick looked at Maxx and thought it was like talking to a world-class envelope licker who's just lost his tongue. Any words of encouragement were instead replaced by a banal platitude.

'But at least you're alive…'

'Yes, alive but now permanently incapable of sex', Maxx said despondently. 'Gone is my eleven inch erection…' ('Yeah, right', thought Dick knowing it had only been ten inches at best). 'Now my only satisfaction derives from getting girls to dress up and play with themselves in front of me'.

'Milk maid?' Dick asked.

Maxx nodded.

'Slutty nurse?'.

Another nod. 'I know I'm predictable', Maxx admitted. 'But it's just a hobby. Not being able to screw meant I had to find a fundamental new purpose in life. That came easy'.

'Unlike you', Dick added, very unhelpfully. Maxx ignored him and continued.

'I actually had two new aims. The first was to get my revenge on the people who dragged me against my will to this godforsaken time and who made me impotent. The second was to find a substitute for sex'.

'The dressing up thing?' asked Dick.

'No you fool!', shouted Maxx, pounding the desk. 'That's just a small but pleasurable diversion! I'm talking about power! The power I could wield by defecting to the Party and rising within its ranks'.

'Oh', said Dick.

'Now come with me. I think we've got a lot of catching up to do, Dick'. Maxx gave a wry smile. 'You don't mind me calling you Dick, do you, Dick?'

Dick shook his head.

'Good. And you may call me Maxx. 'Leader' is so very officious, don't you think?'

Dick was thinking of lots of things, but that definitely wasn't one of them. He was thinking that the game was up, that he was about to die and that he must find a way to escape. Before he had an opportunity to think of any more things Maxx had stood up and was beckoning Dick with his gun. 'Let's continue our conversation in more comfortable surroundings'.

It was as Maxx turned to open the office door that Dick suddenly saw an opportunity to cuff him with the hole punch, steal his gun and make a run for it. He decided, however, to reconsider his plans when he saw Carter standing sternly just outside the doorway. Maxx pocketed his gun and walked ahead of Dick while Carter followed dutifully behind. He didn't hold a weapon but didn't really need to. His expression and body language said more than a loaded gun could ever do.

CHAPTER 29

Drinking brandies, settled in the comfort of his luxurious office, Maxx elaborated on his appearance here. Four years before, just like Dick, he'd been identified by the Resistance and brought forward in time to overthrow the Party. Suddenly it all became clear to Dick.

'You were their great hope. The One!', he exclaimed. 'But you went missing!'

Maxx leaned forward, gently swilling the warm amber contents of his glass. 'The Resistance at that time gave me a new identity and trained me well. Then they sent me out into the field to gain entry into the Party and gather intelligence. All this must sound very familiar to you, Dick'.

Dick nodded. Refilling both their glasses, Maxx explained precisely what had happened.

'Like you must have been, I too was a reluctant hero. I never wanted to carry out any dumb mission but I had no choice. I, too, infiltrated the Party and learned a lot about them. I was committed to my mission but then I had my…

'Massive genital explosion…' Dick interjected.

'Accident', corrected Maxx with a look of annoyance. 'After my accident I decided I wanted to work with the Party rather than against them. The Party leader at the time had what I wanted more than anything'

'A fully operational penis?'

'Total power', said the Leader. 'Total control'.

Maxx explained how he managed to engineer an audience with mid-ranking Party officials. How he admitted who he was, what he was here for and why he wanted to defect. He explained that although he didn't know the location of the resistance headquarters he had enough information to reveal the identity of its leader and key personnel by their appearances. It took a long time, Maxx explained, before these individuals were eventually tracked down and arrested. Interrogation resulted in a few more members being captured. The result was a severely decimated resistance movement and his acceptance into the higher echelons of the Party. Once there, his ascension was rapid.

'And what happened to the resistance members who were captured?' asked Dick.

'They were removed from society'.

'Killed?'

'Liquidated'.

'What's the difference?' asked Dick.

‘None really. But liquidated sounds so much more ruthless’.

‘Then how did you become Leader? What happened to the previous one?’, Dick asked, surprised at Maxx’s seemingly meteoric rise to power.

‘It was tragic. He was working late one night in his office when he fell over and died’.

‘Heart attack? Embolism?’ Dick enquired.

‘No. Shot in the head’. Maxx shrugged. ‘Shit happens’.

‘And you took over?’. Dick asked, a chill rapidly running up his spine.

‘Eventually, yes. There was a bit of an internal power struggle but I persuaded all my rivals that I was the best man for the job. You don’t need to know the boring details of the politics or the body count…’.

There was a buzzing sound and Maxx picked up the telephone from his desk. He looked at his pocket watch, uttered a few noises of agreement and replaced the receiver.

‘I just don’t know where the time goes’, he said. ‘That was Carter reminding me that we need to ask you a few questions about your role in the Resistance. How you kept in contact with them, what your own mission is — everything in fact that they didn’t tell Parnell. Come on, what do you say?’.

Dick couldn’t think of an appropriate response to this, apart from that of assuming a very worried expression, so that’s precisely what he did.

Maxx continued with a creepy smile, ‘I know you’ll want to help us, Dick’.

‘What makes you so sure?’ Dick asked.

‘Torture’, Maxx suggested.

Dick looked confused. He pondered for a short while and then asked, ‘Do we write our names on their backs and let them race. If mine wins I give you information? If yours wins, you let me go?’

It was Maxx’s turn to look confused.

‘Or do we see which one eats the most lettuce?’, added Dick.

Maxx frowned. ‘I’m not sure I understand you’.

‘Tortoise. You said we could resolve this issue by tortoise’.

Maxx sighed. ‘I said ‘torture’’

‘Oh’, said Dick. ‘I’m sure you said tortoise’.

‘No. It was definitely ‘torture’’.

‘Sure?’

‘Absolutely positive’.

‘Well’, Dick continued. ‘That puts a whole new complexion on the matter’.

Dick didn’t like the idea of torture. It was worse than the idea of tortoise, even though he actually suffered from a childhood allergy to

these creatures, and turtles and terrapins too. In fact, the whole damn family of shelled amphibians.

Waving his gun again at Dick, Maxx stood up. 'Come on, let's get the interrogation over with. I'm a very busy man so I can't stay, but I'll see you afterwards'.

Carter opened the office door and stood waiting. Dick was nervous. He'd never been tortured before and in fact, had a very low pain threshold. Even getting cramp in the arch of his foot when he woke up would usually make him yelp like a whipped dog. Dick knew he wouldn't last long under torture so he decided to bluff his way out.

'Fine', said Dick. 'Bring it on. I'm not going to tell you anything! Ever! I can stand being severely beaten'.

Maxx shook his head. 'Dick, that's far too crude and besides, in my experience it takes too long. I like to think I'm a man of taste and sophistication. That's why I favour torture with a certain form of irony'.

Dick's reaction indicated that he wasn't at all sure about ironic torture.

'It seems only just that a penis that has given so much pleasure should now be at the receiving end of a similar degree of pain', Maxx explained. 'Carter will make the necessary arrangements'.

Dick didn't like this. You made the 'necessary arrangements' about booking a hotel, a cab or airline tickets. When used in the context of torture it seemed too casual, as if this was an everyday occurrence. Perhaps, Dick thought as he was being led away by Carter, that here in the Party, it was. Dick was marched down the corridor and into an elevator.

'Press the up button. Press the up button', willed Dick, concentrating as hard as he could. It was inevitable though that Carter pressed the button marked 'basement'. Dick didn't like that. There were never any good things in basements. Basements contained boring things like plant rooms or boilers. But they also contained horrible things like cells and dungeons and it was in one of these that Dick soon found himself.

As dungeons go it was a very clean one; not a piece of hewn rock, dried blood or rusty chain in sight. This one had green-tiled walls and CCTV cameras and what looked like a steel table in the middle of a smooth white floor. It looked, Dick thought, more like an operating theatre than a dungeon.

'Are you sure we've come to the right place?', asked Dick, half playing for time and half just wanting reassurance that he wasn't about to have anything pointy and/or hot in close proximity to his genitals.

Unfortunately Carter couldn't give him the reassurance he sought.

‘It was now or never’, Dick thought to himself. Without warning he swung round and aimed the strongest punch he could at the side of Carter’s head, just above the ear. Almost simultaneously Dick realised that it was the ‘never’ part of his assumption rather than the ‘now’ part that would be true. With an agility that belied his age Carter blocked the blow with his elbow, the same elbow in fact that delivered a sharp jab to Dick’s chin. Whether it was this blow or the knock to the head Dick received when he hit the hard floor is a mute point. What’s important is that Dick was out cold for a short time and when he woke up, found himself firmly strapped to the metal table completely naked apart from something fixed around his waist, covering his groin. Although securely fastened, Dick was able to lift his head a few degrees, which is how he noticed the thing around his waist was actually some sort of box. It was quite a nice one, about six inches square and made of dark tan leather. The sort of box that would be just perfect for keeping letters, keepsakes, photographs or…

‘Wasps’, said Carter.

‘Pardon?’ asked Dick.

‘Wasps. Are you allergic to their stings?’

Dick was confused by this seemingly random question. ‘Er, I don’t think so’.

‘So you won’t go into anaphylactic shock then?’

‘No. Well not as far as I know’.

‘Good, good’, commented Carter with an air of concern. Then, with an air of menace added, ‘Because it’s important that you don’t expire before the torture is fully through!’.

There it was. That damn word again. Like a waiter who can’t stop sneezing, a puncture on a rainy night or the Ghost Rider movie, torture is something you never want to experience. Straining to keep his head raised Dick saw Carter go to a tall cupboard and remove a small jar and a length of clear plastic tubing. Dick said nothing. He wanted to maintain his nonchalant manner and a ‘don’t give a shit’ attitude although this became increasingly difficult as Carter went about his business. The manservant connected one end of the hose to some sort of valve and the other end to the lid of the jar, before filling the jar with something in the corner of the room. It was the sound of buzzing that broke Dick’s resilience and his silence.

Carter saw his puzzled expression. ‘Wasps’, he explained.

‘That’s the third time you’ve said that’, said Dick.

‘Aren’t you remotely interested in what I’m going to do with them?’, asked Carter, an evil smile crossing his lips.

Dick hadn’t seen Carter this excited before. Out of the leader’s shadow he seemed to be relishing his temporary position of power. If Dick could have moved his shoulders he would have shrugged them,

but the straps across his chest were too tight to allow that sort of movement.

'All right, I'll tell you', said Carter. 'You've probably heard of the old Native American punishment where they staked their enemies out in the scorching midday sun and rubbed a sweet tasting and smelling substance on to their chests…'

Dick had heard of this and he didn't like where this history lesson was going.

Carter continued. 'This attracted the attention of fire ants in their thousands who would swarm over their victim and literally sting and devour them to death'.

Dick farted. A dull metallic ring bounced off the table.

'The lucky victims died fairly quickly due to shock. The unlucky ones died slowly in unimaginable agony as first their skin and then their organs were literally eaten away in front of them'.

Another metallic reverberation.

'Well that's what used to happen. We've updated the technique somewhat'.

'You're using wasps instead of ants?', Dick asked, knowing the answer.

Carter shook the jar. A muffled, angry buzzing sound confirmed this. He brought over a small container and with a brush, began to smear a sweet-smelling paste over Dick's chest.

'Aren't you worried that the wasps will fly away?', enquired Dick, smelling the paste and finding it quite appealing.

'Not really', added Carter. 'Because I'm going to introduce them to the box fixed over your groin'. He attached the free end of the hose to an inlet on the underside of the box that Dick couldn't see. He banged the jar a few times. 'By now the wasps are very annoyed. When I turn the valve they'll enter the box and start swarming around'.

'But the paste is on my chest', observed Dick with more than a hint of panic in his voice.

'Precisely', added Carter, banging the jar some more. 'The wasps can smell it but they can't get to it. Think how much more frustrated this will make them'. He smiled his evil smile again. 'Have you ever received multiple stings to your penis?' Carter enquired.

Dick thought for a moment. He was about to say 'yes' but then had to admit that he hadn't.

'Well, the Wasp Box usually gets our suspect talking. In between his bellowing screams, of course'.

Carter slowly turned the valve. Dick raised his head to see a few wasps already in the clear tubing beginning their short journey into the box. The valve was opened a little bit more. Dick wasn't sure why

it taking so long to wake up from this terrible dream. Then he realised why; it wasn't a dream. Dick had never pleaded for anything in his life. Not for justice, for forgiveness or like now, for mercy — but then again, he'd never ever been this helpless with wasps about to crawl all over his manhood. His bowels went momentarily before his resolve.

'Stop it! Please! I'll talk! I'll talk!', he shouted.

'I can't hear you', said Carter. The wasps were now halfway down the tube.

'Please! I'll tell you everything!'. Dick was now screaming.

'What?', Carter asked. The wasps were now mere inches from entering the box. The buzzing became louder and louder, in fact far louder than it should have been.

Dick heard Carter swear under his breath then close the valve. The loud buzzing wasn't from the wasps but from a wall-mounted speaker near the door. Carter walked over to it and pushed a button. Maxx entered. He winced, wafting his hand in front of his face theatrically as if he'd been offended by a particularly nasty smell like, for example, the aftermath of someone voiding their bowels.

'I'm so glad you agreed to co-operate Dick', he said smugly. 'After you've cleaned yourself up tell me all you know and I'll let you live'.

CHAPTER 30

Back in the comfort of his office Maxx studied a lengthy confession. The author of this confession sat facing him, slumped back in his chair, wearing a defeatist expression.

'Didn't know that… Knew that… Knew that… Didn't know that! I had no idea about *that!'* Max put the neatly typed sheets of paper down and looked up.

'Good. Very good Dick. Some interesting things here'. Maxx nodded to no one in particular and made a few hand-written annotations. 'What you've said collaborates our own picture of the Resistance and the reports from Mr. Parnell, or should I say the late Mr. Parnell. Although they seem to have achieved some good technological breakthroughs, on the whole it appears the Resistance are a ramshackle bunch of amateurs chasing after this so-called secret weapon. Most importantly though, it seems there's not a lot more they can do without you. You're their basket'.

'Pardon?', Dick enquired.

'Their basket', Maxx reiterated. 'You know, where they've put all their eggs'.

Dick nodded his understanding of this analogy.

'In any case', Maxx continued confidently, 'Even if you were still at liberty, and still in contact with your colleagues, it wouldn't make one iota of a difference. In a very short time the whole Resistance will be a redundant force'.

Dick stared at Maxx who was clearly enjoying the moment.

'That's right Dick. Your intelligence was correct after all. The best technicians in the Party *were* working on a weapon'.

'I know that', answered Dick. 'Operation Trojan Horse'.

Maxx smiled his creepy smile again. 'That?', he asked. 'That was just a small diversion. A margin note or a side-bar, if you like, in my book of Total Domination'.

'You mean there's another…'

'Secret weapon?' The Leader finished Dick's sentence for him. 'Of course. What sort of fanatical evil leader would I be if I just had one secret weapon? This one will make all future resistance futile!'.

'You seem pretty confident of that', Dick said trying to conceal his anxiety.

'Oh I am Dick, I am', replied Maxx with the smug, self-assured grin of someone not just brimming with confidence, but absolutely teeming with it. 'It's a secret weapon that won't remain a secret for much longer. And after I use it, the Party will be all-powerful and invincible — now and in the future!'

With all this talk about secret weapons and power Dick expected Maxx to cackle maniacally while stroking a fluffy pedigree cat on his lap — but he didn't. In fact he was remarkably reserved about the whole thing (and of course he didn't have a pet cat with him, pedigree or not).

'The deployment of this weapon will usher in a whole new phase of government!' Maxx leant forward towards Dick, 'A government you could still be part of'.

Dick was shocked. Since giving up the information about the Resistance and his own role in their plans he'd been very anxious about his intended fate. Maxx had said his life would be spared but Dick still didn't believe him; anyone who lied about their penis size would be capable of lying about absolutely anything. But here he was, still alive and being offered another chance to join the Party.

'I'm glad you agreed to give in', continued Maxx. 'It would have been such a great shame to have you tortured and killed. Such a waste of a good resource. The Party could do with someone like you Dick, someone with your intelligence but more than that, your deviousness. The same deviousness you've employed to get this far'. Maxx grinned. 'I might be a ruthless leader but I'm also a very pragmatic one. To be blunt, I'd rather work with you than against you'. Maxx rose. 'Let me show you my weapon'.

Dick smiled back. 'Please. I'm not that sort of guy'.

'I think you'll be impressed', Maxx continued.

'Really?', asked Dick, now smiling. 'Remember who you're talking to!'

Dick and Maxx then both fell about in convulsions of laughter, proof if anyone needed it that men of all ages and positions in life could find amusement in jokes about penis size. Trying to compose themselves the two men marched off to look at the Party's secret weapon.

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It was late and very dark when the Party car pulled up outside a familiar building, the Scientific Research Centre. Carter exited first and opened the rear door. Dick and Maxx exited and all three walked to the main entrance in silence. The lobby was empty apart from a bored cleaner polishing the floor and two even more bored security staff polishing their buttons. Startled by the sight of the Leader they jumped to attention and saluted him. Returning the salute the Leader presented his ID chip to the scanner which blinked green. Dick and Carter followed suit.

‘But you’re the Leader. You don’t need to scan, do you?’, asked Dick walking alongside Maxx.

‘There are no exceptions. Not even for me’, Maxx explained. ‘Although it’s highly unlikely, someone could gain access by assuming my appearance and my identity’. He gave a wry smile as he continued at a brisk pace. ‘It *has* been known for people to use fake biometric chips, you know’.

Exiting the elevator on level five they walked along never-ending corridors, passing through three other security posts, the only sounds coming from the echo of their footsteps. Eventually they turned a corner to face two armed guards standing to attention outside a plain door. More salutes were exchanged. Dick noticed that this door resembled all the other plain doors they had walked past apart from one thing; there was no lock. Instead, adjacent to it at head height was a small glass screen. Maxx approached and placed his eye in front of it. Moments later there was a bleep of acceptance followed by a buzz and a whirr; the sound of an intricate lock being activated.

‘Retina scan’, explained Maxx. ‘And it’s only programmed to recognise two people in this facility; myself and my chief scientist, Dr. Hargreaves. Identity chips might be copied but no one can do the same with our retinas. Ispo facto, no one but myself and the good doctor can access this room’.

Dick remembered Dr. Hargreaves from the first time he was at the Scientific Research Centre, a snob of man in a swanky starched white lab coat, he recalled. He was still thinking about him as Carter pulled open the heavy metal door and flicked a switch. Light flooded a large room that was full of identical battered leather suitcases and, in the middle, a trestle table.

‘Here it is’, announced Maxx proudly. ‘The culmination of three years of research and development’.

Dick was about to say something stupid like, ‘The secret weapon is luggage?’ but before he could make a fool of himself Carter picked up one of the cases, hoisted it on to the table, took out a small key and unlocked it. Snapping open the two latches he opened the case. There, resting on a purple crushed-velvet lining was what could only be described as a ‘contraption’. It consisted of a large brass cylinder, several brass spheres, lots of copper tubing, some dials, a few small metal boxes and a whole load of complicated wiring. Dick thought it looked like the result of an unholy alliance between a tuba and a deep sea diver’s breathing apparatus.

‘The device is kept in the case for ease of transportation and for disguise’, Maxx explained. ‘After all, no one would ever expect that an old suitcase contains something of such importance, something of such overwhelming consequence that it will change the world!’.

‘So you keep saying’, said Dick.

‘And do you remember something else I said to you recently — that very soon, all resistance will be futile?’ Dick nodded. ‘Well this is why’.

Dick walked around the table, looking closely at the device within the case.

‘Go on, examine it. Tell me what you think it is’, said Maxx smiling.

Dick ran his hands over the copper tubes and the dials. He put his ear next to the large cylinder. He rapped one of the brass spheres to hear a dull, hollow ring. For some reason only known to him, he even smelled the wiring. He had absolutely no idea what this thing was. Weapons that were designed to have such a fundamental impact should be large, he thought. Large and matt black, the colour of choice for deadly weapons. This looked too small and too shiny to have anywhere near the sort of effect that Maxx was threatening.

‘I’ve never seen anything like it before’, admitted Dick. ‘Can you give me some sort of clue to what the weapon is?’

‘It rhymes with “prom”’, suggested Maxx.

Frown lines took over Dick’s forehead as he thought for a few seconds. ‘Mom?’, he offered.

Maxx shook his head.

‘Vom?’

‘”Vom?” That’s not a word!’ exclaimed Maxx.

‘It’s short for vomit’, offered Dick.

‘Why the fuck would my secret weapon be vomit?’, Maxx said with more than a hint of exasperation in his voice.

Dick’s confused expression indicated that he obviously hasn’t thought this one through. Maxx didn’t have the patience to wait and hear how Dick expected vomit to defeat the resistance movement, so he revealed the answer.

‘Rhymes with “prom”… try “bomb”’.

Dick flinched, accidentally knocking the table in the process and jolting the suitcase. In a reflex move he ducked down, covering his head with his hands.

‘Don’t worry. It’s not primed!’, Maxx explained, smiling.

Dick pulled himself to his feet and tried to regain at least some of dignity he’d just lost. He looked at the device again, this time with more respect. ‘And you’re going to blow up the resistance headquarters with this bomb?’, he asked.

‘No’, Maxx said. ‘*You* don’t even know where it is, so how the hell would we?! In any event, even if we did blow it up, it wouldn’t stop any rebel factions from re-grouping and carrying on their work like they’ve done in the past. Up until now the Resistance has just been an

annoyance — a boil on the backside of the Party. But there's no knowing what trickery they might get up to in the future. Take you for example…'

Dick went slightly red.

'Who knows what damage you might have done if I hadn't recognised you?'

Dick went redder.

'Tell me, how is it that some members of the population question the Party and take petty actions against it?', enquired Maxx. 'The sort of people that the Resistance try and identify and recruit. Why don't these dissidents think and act like 99.9% of the population?'

'The Resistance gives them an antidote to the monthly bromide injections. You must know that', answered Dick. 'This gives people a greater degree of free will. It makes them more questioning about this society'.

'Precisely!' shouted Maxx. 'And as much as it pains me to say it, we've never managed to track down supplies of the antidote and whoever manufactures and distributes it. And we're unable to even identify it within people's bloodstreams. Which is where the bomb comes in.

'Think back to our time Dick. Do you remember something called the neutron bomb? It was an atomic bomb specifically designed to kill people but leave buildings and the infrastructure intact'.

'Sure', Dick agreed. 'It released deadly radiation but without a deadly blast'.

'You've got it!', Maxx smiled. 'And that's what gave me the idea for my weapon'. He patted the device proudly. 'The Impotence Bomb'.

Dick didn't like the word 'impotence' or the word 'bomb' and the two used together gave him severe palpitations.

'I won't bore you with all the details but basically the bomb releases a very specific form of gamma radiation that affects neuro-chemicals in the brain, specifically in the left anterior cingulate cortex'.

Maxx looked at Dick whose confused expression clearly belonged to someone who'd just heard the phrases 'neuro-chemicals' and 'anterior cingulate cortex' in the same sentence.

'In layman's terms', Maxx explained, 'The air borne radiation that will be carried for miles will instantly suppress any form of sexual desire in people'. As if this news wasn't bad enough Maxx added for good measure, 'Permanently'.

'So no one will want sex?' asked a horrified Dick. 'Why on earth would you want that?'

'Easy. No sexual desire means no distractions. And no distractions means people will be more efficient. And if they're more efficient the

economy will prosper. Everyone will benefit from a better standard of living, and the increased productivity will help fund our expansion'.

'Expansion into what?', Dick asked.

'Well first Europe and then, well who knows?'

'But we don't have contact with any other country?', said Dick.

'Not yet. But we will, when we threaten other nations with the Impotence Bomb'.

It's disconcerting when someone strokes an inanimate object in an overtly sexual way and doubly so when the object in question is a bomb — but that's exactly what Maxx did as he outlined his plans for world domination.

'I feel it's time for the United Kingdom to end this self-imposed period of isolation. Our first foreign target will be our neighbour France; a nation fiercely proud of its reputation for romance and love', said Maxx. 'We'll explode the first bomb in France over a minor target like Lille or Bordeaux and then threaten the city of l'amour itself, Paris. Do you think red-blooded French leaders will let this happen to their country, let alone themselves?

'Non! Of course they won't! And with France under my total control I'll then threaten Spain and Italy. Two other countries that, I'm certain, would rather submit to my rule than surrender their nations' considerable libidos'.

Dick gasped as the enormity of what Maxx was saying began to sink in.

'From then on, nation after nation will fall before me like dominoes!'.

'You mean like those displays where the whole floor is covered in dominoes and one knocks another one and that knocks another that knocks another and then the whole lot fall down making all sort of different shapes and some of them go round in circles and some go up and down little ramps or miniature see-saws until they all fall down making a gigantic pattern?', asked Dick.

Maxx ignored him and continued. 'Take Sweden. What would it be without its reputation as the free-love centre of the world? Or Holland? 15% of its gross domestic revenue comes from taxes paid by legalised prostitutes. And what about Thailand? Its entire economy is based on sex-tourism. That, and table tennis balls. And Greece and Turkey? These countries would dissolve into revolution with the end of man-love!'

'You're not satisfied by the ultimate power you have here?', asked Dick, horrified.

'No!' exclaimed a wide-eyed Maxx. 'When I was able to perform as a porn star I had an insatiable appetite for sex…'

'And this has been replaced by an insatiable appetite for power?'

‘Precisely… Controlling the United Kingdom was mere foreplay…’

Dick tried to comprehend all the repercussions of this worrying metaphor. Had Maxx’s strengthening of the security forces been the equivalent of nipple rubbing? Had his CCTV monitoring of all public places been analogous to a blow job? Then he asked more sensibly, ‘But what about reproduction? Surely you’ll still need sex for this?’

‘We don’t need to’, Maxx said nonchalantly. ‘All our research and forecasting point to a population at optimum size. In the long-term future, if we need to reproduce then we’ll use frozen sperm that the Party has been collecting and storing’.

‘But what about Party members?’, Dick asked. ‘Will there be an antidote from the radiation for people like us?’

Maxx gave Dick the sort of look you’d give someone if they said that Hayden Christensen and Hugh Grant were talented actors.

‘Why on earth would I do that?’, he asked. ‘Party members are far more intelligent than the general population. Their satisfaction derives from increased power and responsibility, not from a few primitive grunts and pelvic thrusts. The effect of the bomb will only enhance their true potential’.

Dick knew the Impotence Bomb was the work of a madman. A madman who had decided that if he couldn’t have sex, then no one else could. In fact, it was the work of a bitter, twisted, aggrieved and resentful madman with pieces of shrapnel embedded in his scrotum. And they’re the very worst.

‘Twelve Impotence Bombs will be launched by small rockets and detonated simultaneously over Britain’s major cities’, Maxx said, gesturing to Carter who closed and locked the suitcase. As the only one in the Resistance aware of the bombs and their devastating effect, Dick realised it was he alone who had to destroy them before they were used.

‘When er… when do you intend to launch?’, enquired Dick in a very laid back, I don’t give a shit but I’m just asking politely, matter-of-fact sort of way.

‘Well’, Maxx said, ‘There’s still the final computer simulations for blast range, uploading a slight modification to the guidance system, the final testing and assembly process under carefully controlled conditions and then transportation and installation at all the launch sites…’ He paused for a moment. ‘Sunday evening, I think’.

Maxx looked at his pocket watch. ‘It’s late and we should go’. Dick felt very uneasy as the trio exited the room. Carter closed the heavy door behind them and it locked automatically with a reassuring loud clang. Dick reflected that the corridor seemed as bleak as the future. He had less than three days to save everyone in the country, in particular himself, from instant and irreversible impotence. The sound

of Maxx and Carter conversing in low voices shook Dick from his contemplations.

'So, what next?' asked Dick. 'Where do we go now?'

Maxx turned to Dick. 'I'm afraid you're not leaving here Dick'.

Dick gulped. He'd seen too much. Maxx nodded at Carter who reached into his jacket pocket. 'No!' Dick shouted. He threw himself to the hard floor, winced from the pain of a bruised kneecap, then grabbed Maxx's ankle. 'I'll help you. I'll do anything!'

The more Maxx shook his leg, trying to dislodge Dick, the more Dick increased his grip. 'Please!', Dick implored. 'Don't shoot'. This pleading, he thought, was beginning to be a habit. And although it was totally out character he wasn't ashamed to do anything in order to survive even if it meant begging like a dog. A dirty, mangy dog. A dirty mangy dog about to get shot. The next sound Dick heard wasn't the expected gun being fired. It was the sound of Maxx laughing. He heard the security guards sniggering and even thought he heard the usually reserved Carter offer a mild chortle. Dick looked up and opened one eye to see the manservant holding out an electronic door key.

'This is your room key', Maxx explained. 'I've carried out a risk assessment and am glad to say that you present a negligible one, which is why I am allowing you to stay here, in this facility'.

An uncomfortable-looking Dick released Maxx's ankle, got up from the floor, rubbed his still-painful kneecap and dusted himself down. Carter handed Dick the plastic card.

'I think you'll be very interested in what's going on as we complete the bombs and get ready for the detonation', Maxx explained. 'You'll have free access here as long as you don't hinder the work of the various technicians. As you know, they have very tight deadlines to meet'.

'And with me staying within this building', said Dick, now over his embarrassment and feeling more bullish now he knew he wasn't going to die, 'You'll also be able to keep an eye on me'.

'You're so cynical Dick', said Maxx smiling. 'I just want you here to see all the preparatory work in progress. You'll find it fascinating. But more than that, I want you here when we launch the first bomb over London'.

'And why is that?', Dick asked. 'Just so you can gloat?'

'No', Maxx smiled. 'Just so you can push the launch button'. All Dick could do was stare as Maxx continued. 'The man famed for his legendary erections will be the man who launches the first impotence bomb. Now how fucking ironic is that?'

Dick had to admit that as ironies went, it *was* fucking up there with the best.

CHAPTER 31

Dick usually woke up feeling horny but this Friday morning he woke up feeling very horny and also very nostalgic. That's not to say he was thinking about various sexual exploits in his past, and god knows there were thousands of these. No, this morning he was nostalgic for the reason that brought him to this research facility the first time; Jack. He wanted to find out where the mechanical murderer was being stored and pay him a visit. This was partly out of curiosity, partly because he had so much time to kill, but mainly because it would act as a diversion while he tried to figure out a way of thwarting Maxx's evil plans.

After quickly washing and dressing Dick left his room. True to Maxx's word, he was allowed to wander freely about the facility but despite this apparent liberty Dick felt he was, in effect, in an open prison. He remembered being here the first time developing Jack, and how tedious it was. Sure, the building was teeming with men and women, scientists, engineers and technicians but they were too busy and too focussed to spend much time with him to explain what they were doing or even just stop for a chat. Apart from being boring this previous visit has also given rise to feelings of inadequacy; the same thing was happening again. Dick became very self-conscious that he didn't have a white lab coat, and felt very conspicuous and uncomfortable without one. In the tenth floor cafeteria he had a coffee and an iced bun and read the morning newspapers, conscious that people were staring at him. He was just leaving when he almost collided with a technician hurrying down the corridor carrying a long, flapping computer print out.

'I'm so sorry', the man said, staring at Dick. 'You're Jeremy Brunel. I've heard about you'.

Dick was pleased that his reputation preceded him. He admitted he was Jeremy, realising that Maxx couldn't have revealed the truth about Dick and his recent unmasking. He was very much one for maintaining the status quo and for keeping up appearances.

'I heard you were here. Under the personal invitation of the Leader', the technician said. Dick felt that the word 'orders' was more appropriate than the word 'invitation' but decided to go along with the charade.

'That's right. He thought it would be useful for me to see the final preparations for the, er…' Dick touched the side of his nose and winked. 'You know…'

The technician looked at him blankly.

'You know', Dick continued. 'The, er…' This time he winked and

stamped his right foot twice.

No reaction. Dick touched the other side of his nose, winked with his other eye and stamped his foot four times. Nothing. Dick looked both ways down the corridor and made the sound of a muffled explosion then grabbed his genitals and performed a mime of them melting away into nothing. The technician frowned so Dick grabbed the lapels of his lab coat and pulled him close towards him, speaking through gritted teeth, 'The incotence gong'.

'Incotence gong?' asked the technician.

'Gat's got I said', Dick replied, then opening his mouth properly explained, 'I was talking through my teeth'.

'Why?' asked the technician.

'Because the Impotence Bomb is a top-secret project, that's why!' Dick replied in annoyance.

'No it's not', said the technician. 'Everyone on the upper levels knows about it. We're working round the clock to get it ready for launch on Saturday'.

'Sunday' replied Dick.

'I brought it forward a day', announced a different voice. Dick turned to see Maxx, accompanied by Carter, walking towards them. Maxx shooed the technician away and the anxious-looking man scuttled down the corridor almost colliding with someone else.

'Why did you do that?' Dick enquired, with a trace of anxiety in his voice. Now he only had two days to save the world.

'Impatience', said Maxx calmly. 'And because I'm the Leader. It means I can do things like that'.

'But will you be ready in time?'

'Yes', Maxx said with an air of confidence so absolute that it was scary. 'Half the people in this building have been taken off their various projects to provide assistance'. Maxx put a friendly arm around Dick and the two of them walked along. 'Now, what are your plans today Dick?'

'I'd like to see Jack. For old time's sake', Dick answered nervously.

'What a splendid idea', Maxx said. 'I think he's kept on one of the sub-levels but ask any of the staff here. They know you're my special guest and will only be too pleased to assist. After you've finished, join me at four o'clock in the main test laboratory for one of the bomb's final trials. You'll find it very educational'.

At the next intersection Maxx and Carter turned left and Dick turned right. He didn't go right for any reason other than that he wanted to get away from Maxx who continued to make him feel very uneasy. Dick wandered around for a while until he'd put some distance between him and the Leader and then asked a white-coated

woman where he could find Jack. She made a few enquiries and then directed Dick to a room down on sub level four. A few minutes, and a convoluted route later, Dick reached the room in question. He hesitated before opening the door.

His expectation was of seeing Jack presented in some sort of glass showcase, perhaps cordoned off by a thick blue rope, with a plaque explaining his background and the valuable contribution made by Jeremy Brunel. Dick pushed open the door and turned on the lights. After their flickering became a steady glow Dick realised he was in what appeared to be less of a museum environment and more of a glorified storeroom. Jack was standing in the corner surrounded by an assortment of de-commissioned, or just broken, mechanical equipment. In fact he wasn't even standing. He was leaning against a wall and his suit, while free of the stains of hydraulic fluid and fake blood, was covered in dust. His posture, appearance and environment were certainly not in keeping with his character of a rich, well-to-do man about town, and definitely didn't reflect the success he'd recently enjoyed.

Dick hop-scotched over an assortment of metal junk and old cables to reach Jack. With some difficulty he managed to stand the heavy figure upright then brushed the dust from its shoulders. A bulge in Jack's jacket pocket revealed a long knife in a sheath. Dick withdrew it. The blade was tarnished but still deadly. He replaced it and then felt the operating switch concealed under Jack's collar. Dick really wanted to flick it on to see what happened but he wasn't sure if this was wise. While he was deliberating, a nasally voice echoed in the room.

'Turn him on if you like'. Dick spun round to see Dr. Hargreaves standing in the doorway. 'He's probably still part-charged up but he can't do anything. We had him de-programmed after his work was done'. Dr. Hargreaves negotiated his way over to Dick and limply shook his hand with the same degree of contempt he'd shown at their last meeting.

'I've just been with the Leader. He told me where I might find you'. Dick knew Hargreaves had been sent to keep an eye on him. 'Jack was a tremendous success and a real feather in our cap. Should he ever need to, he's ready to go into action again at short notice; all he needs is re-programming, re-charging and a quick wash and brush-up'. Dr. Hargreaves continued in a begrudging tone. 'Your contribution to the project was highly regarded'. Speaking under his breath, but still loud enough for Dick to hear, he added, 'by some'.

The two men continued with small talk about Jack and his mission but any bonhomie between them was very phoney and extremely awkward. In fact Dick wasn't even listening to what the

doctor was saying; he was trying to think of a way to get rid of him so he could be alone. Dick needed time to think and work out a plan of action. Hargreaves, likewise, wasn't listening to what Dick was saying; he was thinking of an excuse to leave so he could get back to his real work. After all, he was a chief scientist, not a spy. And besides, Dick was pretty harmless in this storeroom, lost in his memories and the junk here. The solution to both of their wishes came via a knock on the door followed by a familiar voice.

'Dr. Hargreaves?'.

The doctor turned to the tall, distinguished looking man standing in the open doorway and smiled. 'Kelvin? Come in. Let me introduce you to someone you obviously know by reputation'.

Turning to Dick, Dr. Hargreaves said 'Jeremy, this is Kelvin Huntley, a Grade 3b programmer on Project Gladstone. He was one of the back-room boffins. I don't think you two ever met'.

As Kelvin approached, Dick's eyes popped out of his skull on coiled springs to the accompaniment of a klaxon. His jaw dropped to the floor and his tongue unrolled all the way across it. Of course, these things didn't actually happen — but they would have if Dick had been a cartoon character. The reason? The two men *had* met before, quite a number of times in fact. On these occasions though, Dick knew Kelvin Huntley by a different name. That name was Taylor.

Taylor (aka Kelvin) shook Dick's hand warmly but he gave no indication whatsoever of any previous meetings. 'I'm so pleased to eventually meet you Mr. Brunel. This was a great project to work on. We pushed the boundaries on programming, creating new cybernetic algorithms as we went. I'd really like to tell you all about the complexities of the project and how we overcame the problems along the way'.

'That's a splendid idea Kelvin', said an enthusiastic Dr. Hargreaves, realising this was the excuse to leave he so dearly needed. 'I'm sure Mr. Brunel would love to hear all the intricacies about Project Gladstone. Don't spare him the detail though!' Turning to Dick the doctor added, 'You're in good hands Jeremy. You'll find what Kelvin has to say truly interesting'. He looked at his watch. 'I have to go now but I'll see you at four in the test lab. Kelvin will show you the way'.

Dr. Hargreaves left, closing the door behind him.

Taylor put his fingers to his lips and mouthed, 'Shhhhh' before continuing. 'Let me start at the beginning Mr. Brunel', he said, still with no hint of recognition in his voice or in his expression. 'We had four main obstacles to overcome with the programme starting with a logarithmic inexactitude that needed addressing and a conflict in the hexadecimal point syntax. And when we considered the concurrent

logic circuits, it transpired there was a procedural paradigm in the source code!'

Taylor went on like this for seemingly ages. Then again, it might have been for just a few minutes but all the talk about coding linguistics and programming hypotheses made it seem like ages. Still talking, Taylor quietly pushed the storeroom door open as quietly as he could, peeked out in both directions and then closed it again. He took out his pocket watch and opened the back to reveal some sort of gauge, pointing it all around the room.

'OK, it's not bugged. We're clear!'. Putting the watch away Taylor hugged Dick but in a manly way, the way a leader of the Resistance would hug his key operative.

'It's great to see you', Taylor whispered. 'I can't thank you enough for giving Alice that warning about Parnell'. Taylor shook his head. 'In the back of my mind I knew his defection was too good to be true. I should have listened to you. Yes, I know I was too hasty and I am truly ashamed of my actions'.

'That's OK', said Dick, still recovering from the shock of seeing him. 'Is everyone OK?'

'Yes. Thanks to you', said Taylor. 'I couldn't believe it when I heard you were here. I had to find you!'

'And I can't believe you worked here all along. And on Project Gladstone too!', gasped Dick. 'How come we never met when I was here before?'

'There were a couple of occasions where our paths could have crossed but I made certain I kept right out of your way. If you ever saw me or knew what I did here it would have compromised my position'. Taylor continued. 'That time in the library when we discussed Alice, I told you I knew about the scheme and that I had an engineering background. I couldn't tell you any more in case you were ever captured'.

'I wouldn't have revealed that sort of information', Dick said confidently.

'But what if you were tortured?'

Dick gulped. It was a big gulp. A gulp in direct proportion to the enormity of what he was about to say. 'Ah… yes… *If* I was tortured…'

'That's right. How do you know you wouldn't have cracked? I've heard of the strongest-willed men and women crumbling under Party torture'.

'Theyweregoingtogetwaspstostingmynob!', blurted Dick.

'Pardon', said Taylor.

'Wasps. On my nob. Crawling over it. Stinging it. Time and time again. Venom entering my penis. Attacking the nerve ends. Burning. Burning. I couldn't take it!' Dick was hysterical. Taylor slapped him

across the face.

‘Pull yourself together man! You’re talking jibberish. You’re no use to anyone like this. Tell me everything that’s happened since that Ruling Council meeting’. Then he slapped him again, this time really hard. This slap wasn’t actually necessary; it’s just that Taylor still had a tiny, lingering amount of seething resentment as a result of what happened between Dick and Alice and this was his way of finally getting closure.

So, perched on a large cable drum, Dick told Taylor all the recent news, each subsequent disclosure being more significant and almost more unbelievable than the previous. Dick told Taylor about Benjamin not being a subversive and how Vera framed him. Then Dick told him about how he was exposed by the Leader and who the leader actually was — not just a resistance member who suddenly vanished, but Dick’s old rival. By this point Taylor didn’t know whether he was prepared for any more revelations but Dick continued, revealing in graphic detail how he’d been tortured, although he elaborated on one tiny part of the story to make him sound more heroic. In Dick’s re-imagining of the events the insects had actually been released into the wasp box and were crawling all over his penis, stinging it time after time after time until he gave in and confessed everything he knew about the Resistance and his own mission. Dick saved the best piece of news for last; the secret weapon itself.

Taylor had mixed emotions. He was livid that Dick had given in to torture, even if it did involve wasps and his penis. He was delighted that he’d been right all along about a secret weapon. And he was absolutely terrified on hearing that the weapon was going to be launched the day after tomorrow.

‘My god!’, Taylor exclaimed. ‘So it’s an Impotence Bomb!’

‘You didn’t know about it?’ asked Dick in amazement. ‘Even though you worked here?’

‘No. None of us working in my section have been involved in any part of the project’ said Taylor. ‘There are different levels of security clearance embedded in our ID chips and as a mere Grade 3b programmer I’m not allowed access to the upper levels of this building where the bomb was being developed’. Taylor stood up and began to pace the room, which wasn’t easy as most of the floor space was covered in junk. ‘We’ve got to consider our next course of action — and quickly. Let’s see what we’ve got’.

Counting on his fingers Taylor began summarising the status as he saw it. ‘Point one, we know about the weapons and where they’re currently stored in this building. Point two, you’ve still got your freedom…’

‘Very limited freedom’, interjected Dick, rubbing his crotch to

make it look like the unbelievably painful wasp stings he received during his torture were still causing him a high degree of discomfort.

'Granted, but at least you're not dead or imprisoned', Taylor added, 'And that means, point three; you can still potentially stop the launch or at least disable the bombs'.

'You forgot point four: how the fuck am I going to do that? The bombs are kept in a locked room protected round the clock by two armed guards and the only people who can access them are Maxx or Hargreaves via a retina scan', Dick said dejectedly, adding for good measure, 'And they'll soon be ready, primed and transported to multiple launch sites'.

'I see'. Taylor rubbed his chin, deep in thought. Then he rubbed his chin some more before finally saying, 'That means we need to put point five into effect'.

'And that is…?' Dick asked.

'Our plan'.

Now it was time for Dick to rub his chin. I don't mean that Dick rubbed Taylor's chin. That would be odd and quite disturbing. No. Dick rubbed his own chin. 'So, you've got a plan, eh?'

It turned out that Taylor did. He outlined the basics to Dick and the two of them fleshed it out, there and then. As plans went it seemed to work in principle, but then again, most plans do. This plan required Taylor's technical skills and Dick's ability to move within the research facility without arousing too much suspicion. The biggest stumbling point was getting access to the bombs. Neither of them could figure a way of doing that discretely, so both agreed to sleep on the problem.

Taylor looked at his pocket watch. 'Right. It's ten minutes to four. I'll show you where the main test lab is then I've got to go. Come back here tomorrow morning at nine. Tell Hargreaves that you want to continue our discussion'.

'But he might not want me to', suggested Dick.

'I know Hargreaves', said Taylor confidently. 'He'll be under immense pressure from the Leader to finalise every single detail for the launch; to check, cross-check and cross-cross-check everything so that absolutely nothing goes wrong. The last person he wants interfering in anything or bothering him is you. Say you want to keep out of his way for the day and he'll breathe a huge sigh of relief and send you on your way with his blessing. I guarantee it'.

'Nine it is then', said Dick as they both set off for the test lab.

CHAPTER 32

The Leader looked Dick up and down when he entered the test lab then turned to Hargreaves.

'I was wrong. He's still wearing them'.

Dick looked confused. Maxx turned back and smiled.

'Your pants. I understand one of Dr. Hargreave's technicians was giving you an impromptu lecture all about Jack's programming. I said I bet he bores your pants off'.

Dick gave Maxx an earnest look. 'Actually it really put the whole operation into perspective. It was fascinating understanding how and why Jack acted and reacted the way he did, but we ran out of time just when we got to debugging and static memory testing. If it's all right with you I'd like to finish the discussion tomorrow morning. I told Kelvin I'd obviously have to get your consent'.

Hargreaves looked at the Leader who looked at Dick through slightly closed eyes. If eyes could speak these were the sort of eyes that would say, 'Are you bullshitting me?'

Dick added, 'Of course if it's not OK then that's fine. I'd be more than happy to shadow Dr. Hargreaves so I can learn what's going on'.

Maxx considered the options. 'Well, as long as you don't distract this technician from his duties and Dr. Hargreaves is happy with this arrangement, then finish off your discussion'.

Dr. Hargreaves couldn't wait to nod his approval. 'This particular member of staff isn't involved in the bomb project at all. It's all right'.

'Splendid', said Maxx. 'Then let's get on with the demonstration'. He clapped his hands together loudly. 'Let's see the guinea pigs!'.

On this cue shutters opened in the far wall of the test lab to reveal a large plate glass window. Maxx, Carter, Harvgreaves and three other technicians walked over to the window and peered in. Dick followed and pressed his nose to the glass. He was looking into a small adjacent room but there were no guinea pigs in it, just rabbits. There were about twenty of them wearing blue and pink collars to signify their gender. While a few were scampering around, the majority were doing what they do best. Humping. Like rabbits. While Hargreaves consulted his colleagues over some technical issues, Maxx explained to Dick that they were re-testing the strength of gamma radiation the bomb would release. This needed to be strong enough to cause almost sudden and permanent impotence without causing any other serious side effects. What Dick was about to witness was one of the last trials.

'You're going to dose the rabbits with radiation?' asked Dick, adding, with a sense of alarm in his voice, 'Now. With us here?'

'Yes', said Maxx. 'Just a small controlled burst. Don't worry, the

wall is lead-lined and the glass has a reflective coating. The radiation can't affect you'. He laughed. 'You still have one day of non-impotence left. I would say 'make the most of it', but stuck here in this facility, it rather limits the possibility!'

He laughed some more and slapped Dick on the back but Dick failed to see the joke. Dr. Hargreaves walked over to a small control panel by the window and spoke in a low nasal monotone into a microphone.

'Verification test 114.1. Radiation type Gamma Delta 53. Two second burst. Cameras rolling'.

He turned a large red switch and Dick peered through the glass. Nothing happened. Well not at first, but after about thirty seconds the rabbits that had been mating had separated. Dick peered through then glass more intently and saw that an obvious change had occurred to the rabbits wearing the blue collars. Before the experiment they looked happy and perky. Now they all shared the same sad, bewildered and bemused expression. The sort of expression, Dick imagined, you'd have if you were dedicating the rest of your life to making models out of matchsticks, or worshipping god. The look of someone who'd suddenly lost every single ounce of his sex drive.

'Excellent. Excellent', said Maxx.

He turned to Dick but found he was no longer standing next to him. Dick was sitting on a chair in the corner of the room, holding his head in his hands.

- - o O o - -

There was little Dick could do without Taylor so he decided to get an early night and wake up refreshed, ready for action. Maxx had told him that work on the bombs would continue throughout the night, that final checks would be completed by midday and that then they would be transported to the various launch sites up and down the country. The launch was scheduled for 10pm. Dick wondered if Maxx had lied about this and would suddenly announce he was bringing the launch forward just like he'd recently done. However, with the amount of work and testing seemingly still to be carried out, he doubted if this was physically possible.

Dick slept badly that night, tortured by a series of unpleasant dreams, metaphors for his impending fate. In all these dreams he was naked. He saw himself at various times sliding down a banister made of razor blades, trying to leap over a barbed wire fence and snagging himself – and having a piece of cheese wire wrapped around his penis and then being dragged along the ground by a hovercar.

He slipped in and out of consciousness but awoke with a smile on his face, putting all thoughts of severed penises and ripped scrotums out of his mind. While he was asleep, being tormented by these visions, another part of his mind had worked out the missing part of the plan. He dressed, had a quick breakfast and by 8.55 was making his way down to the storeroom to seek out Taylor.

- - o O o - -

'It's ruthless'. Taylor took a deep breath before continuing. 'And it involves the cold-blooded murder of innocent people'.

'I know', Dick said. 'But it's the only way I can see the plan working. And it should be relatively easy to orchestrate. All you need to do is make use of your existing skills'.

'You're asking a hell of a lot', Taylor said.

'I assume you can do the programming?' Dick asked.

'Well I've got to, haven't I?' said Taylor.

It was rhetorical question but Dick still answered, 'Yes, you do'.

Taylor estimated there was four hour's work ahead of him and then half an hour for uploads. Dick estimated they only had two hours to do this. Taylor swore. Dick felt that the short time they had left could actually work in their favour as it meant that Maxx's and Hargreave's concentration would be focused completely on the impending launch – not on where Dick was, or what he might be doing.

While Taylor inputted lines and lines of unintelligible code from a portable terminal, Dick held the door ajar and kept watch, mindful of anyone paying them a surprise visit. Fortunately they weren't disturbed and just after half past eleven Taylor unplugged the cable interface from the back of Jack's head and let out a sigh.

'This is our one chance Dick, our only hope of stopping Maxx. And I've had no option but to rush the programming!', Taylor warned. 'I haven't been able to run tests or cross-checks. There's no knowing what could happen when he's activated!'

Dick knew time was of the essence. As Taylor was worrying about his programming skills he felt under Jack's collar and activated the small switch. There was a reassuring click and Dick stepped back.

Nothing.

He clicked the switch off and on. Then again. Nothing. He clicked it several times in quick succession but Jack stood there, ironically, completely stiff.

'I don't understand', said Taylor. 'He's been fully charged. He should just power up'.

Dick clicked the switch off and on again and on getting no response, frustratingly kicked Jack in the backside. Jack's eyes blinked opened and the initially faint but then distinctive smell of hydraulic fluid filled the room as the liquid began to circulate around his body.

'Let's get this fun over with', said Dick. He shook Taylor's hand and the two men watched in nervous amazement as Jack made his way to the door in silence, opened it, and walked along the corridor taking strong, purposeful strides.

Elsewhere in the building, somewhere on the upper levels, Maxx was having a heated exchange with Dr. Hargreaves. The doctor had explained there was a tiny, itsy-bitsy problem with a fuel vent in the propulsion system of the rockets that would carry the bombs and this was being sorted as they spoke. Or rather shouted. Maxx was stressed and anxious. The development of the Impotence Bomb had been the culmination of three years of intense development since he'd come to power. It's what had driven him throughout all those long, barren sex-free years and now, just a few hours before launch he wasn't going to let some stupid minor technical glitch spoil his fun. However, what *was* going to spoil his fun was already taking place on sub level four.

Taylor had taken a spare white coat and had put this over Jack's suit so he could wander around relatively anonymously. The biggest problem they had to overcome was the fact that Jack had no ID chip embedded in his fake skin, and Taylor's chip wouldn't permit him access above level three. This meant that when they reached a security station they'd have to rely on brute force to get through. Strictly speaking though, brute force wasn't Jack's thing. He was better than that. He'd been designed, built and programmed to be a discrete but effective killing machine. And today Taylor and Dick were relying on him to play that part perfectly.

The trio approached the security station on the way to the elevator. Dick presented his ID chip and walked through the turnstile but just after he passed through he stumbled and fell. As the guard's attention was diverted Jack struck. In a flash he'd withdrawn his knife and plunged it deep into the guard's chest, puncturing his heart. Death was instant; the guard didn't even have time to let out a grunt or a groan. Jack dragged the dead guard to the scanner and passed his hand over it twice so that he and Taylor could pass through. They hid the body in a janitor's store cupboard, wiped a small spillage of blood from the clean white floor and took the elevator up nine floors to level five.

Dick retraced his steps here, passing through the three security stations on the way to their final destination. Each time he diverted the guards' attention and each time Jack struck with the same lightning speed. It was important that like their first victim, these

guards were killed quickly and cleanly so they had no time to cry for help or set off an alarm. Jack varied the methods used; part of his original programming had been a full understanding of the human anatomy and Taylor had made sure that this information had been restored along with the details of his new mission. The first two guards died from knife wounds to the base of their skulls that severed their brain stems while the third was stabbed in the neck causing massive internal haemorrhaging. Dick felt a slight twinge of guilt in these killings of what were basically innocent men, but he told himself that the ends justified the means.

There didn't seem to be any sort of storeroom or cupboard near the third security station so they slumped the dead guard's body back in his chair as if he was asleep on the job. Dick hoped that anyone seeing the knife wound might assume that the guard had a particularly hairy neck and had cut himself shaving. With Jack and Taylor hanging back, Dick turned the final corner and saw the two armed guards on duty in front of the locked door that protected the bombs. The guards tensed and reached for their guns as he approached.

'Hello. I'm Jeremy Brunel', said Dick.

'We know', said Guard One.

'The Leader said I could look around this facility'.

'We know that too', said Guard Two.

'Good, well in that case', Dick said, gesturing to the locked room, 'I need to look inside. I'm helping with a technical issue'.

'I'm afraid that's impossible, Mr. Brunel', said Guard One, 'The lock can only be opened by the Leader or Dr. Hargreaves'.

'Damn!', said Dick trying to look disappointed. 'I don't really want to disturb the leader as he's really, really busy, so can you call Dr. Hargreaves and let me talk to him'.

Guard Two sighed then got on his radio, demonstrating the familiar reluctance to help that seems inbred within security personnel. It seemed like an eternity before he reached the doctor. Dick took the handset and turning away from the guard, spoke in a low voice.

'Doctor Hargreaves… yes, everything's fine… Listen, if the Leader is with you don't tell him what I'm about to say… Just listen… Kelvin Huntley is going to blackmail you. He's shown me evidence and is about to go public. Something about a research grant… Calm down! I know a way to resolve this quickly without the Leader finding out, but you need to meet me now… Yes… OK… I'll stay here'.

Smiling, Dick handed the radio back to the guard. The ruse had worked. He had no idea if or how Hargreaves could be blackmailed but he figured that all scientists misused funds now and again — and

the obviously worried Hargreaves turned out to be no exception. For all Hargreaves knew, Dick was waiting for him alone. He had absolutely no idea that Taylor and Jack were waiting in the wings, ready to make their move.

This move was made with Jack's usual speed and panache. He ran around the corner and before the guards knew what was happening or could sound the alert his hands had moved with their usual deftness. The last thing the guards saw was a flash of bright steel slicing through the air. The last thing they felt was the sudden sharp pain of stab wounds to their vital organs. The sound of these two dead guards slumping to the ground was the sign for Taylor to show himself and for Jack and him to strip the guards and put on their uniforms.

It was unfortunate that the guards on duty that day weren't blessed with an excess of height. Taylor and Jack were both tall men and they looked silly wearing their new clothes. Their jacket sleeves finished two inches shy of their wrists, while their trouser hems looked like they'd had a fierce argument with their shoes. Jack, with his muscled physique looked the most ridiculous, threatening to erupt from its confines of his uniform at any moment. Dick hoped that Hargreaves wouldn't notice these sartorial blunders and in fact, he didn't. He didn't even notice the fact that there were guards missing from the first two security posts he hurried through on that floor, or that the third guard was seemingly asleep at his post.

He arrived outside the locked door out of breath. 'What on earth has Huntley been saying about me?', he asked with an air of panic in his voice. 'You said something about the research budget, well I can easily account for the missing funds…' He glanced at the guards and exclaimed, 'Wait! That man…'. Then he said, 'Humphhh…. Humphhh…'

Jack had stepped forward, covering Hargreaves' mouth with one hand, holding him securely round the chest with the other. The doctor now recognised Jack and Kelvin and since he couldn't speak, could only express extreme surprise with his eyes.

'Right', Dick said. 'We're going to release you on the condition that you remain here, speak only in a whisper and follow every one of our orders. If you co-operate you'll live. If you don't, then Jack will remove your liver and pancreas and force them down your throat so you suffocate. If you understand say 'Humphhh''. Hargreaves made the appropriate noise. Dick nodded to Jack who released his grip on the doctor.

'First, give me your coat', ordered Dick.

'Hold on. That's not part of the plan', protested Taylor as Hargreaves hurriedly removed his coat.

'I know', said Dick as he began to put it on. 'It's just that I've

always wanted one of these and it seems right and just that I take this one – even if it is a bit snug'. Turning to Hargreaves Dick said, 'We want you to open the door'.

'Never', said Dr. Hargreaves.

'Shhhhhhhhhh!', said Taylor.

'Never', repeated Dr. Hargreaves again, this time at a quieter level that wouldn't attract unwanted attention. 'If I let you in you'll just destroy the bombs!'

'Really Dr. Hargreaves', said Taylor. 'We thought you'd do better than that. Just think what will happen to you if you don't do as we say'. Jack silently removed his knife and wiped some remaining blood on the jacket he was wearing.

'If I don't do what you say then you'll kill me', a defiant Hagreaves replied. 'And if I do what you say, the Leader will kill me'. With a scientist's natural logic Dr. Hargreaves summed up the situation perfectly, adding as his conclusion, ' Therefore it doesn't really matter what you do to me'.

Taylor and Dick were slightly taken aback. 'And if I'm dead how are you going to open the doors? Remember the retina scanner will only recognise myself or the Leader, and I can guarantee that the Leader will never listen to your demands! And here he comes now!'

Taylor, Dick and Jack suddenly looked down the corridor. At the same time Hargreaves decided to try and escape. Predictably, a scientist, even a chief one, was no match for an agile mechanical killing machine. Hargreaves barely reached the corner before Jack grappled him to the ground, then pinned him down by sitting on his chest. Hargreaves tried to scratch Jack's face, throwing punches at him like a girl. He managed to shout for help just once before Jack stopped him in the quickest way he knew; severing his throat and simultaneously, his carotid artery. Blood shot up into the air and all over Jack, who fulfilled his programming by removing Hargreaves' organs and stuffing them in his mouth, although the liver kept falling through the gaping hole in his throat and Jack had to keep putting it back. Taylor and Dick witnessed the whole disturbing scene with mixed emotions: horror, fascination and satisfaction. 'OK Jack', said Dick, 'Finish the job'. Then to Taylor, 'This is the part I just can't watch'.

Moments later the three men were standing outside the door.

'Open it please, Jack'. Jack held his hand up to the scanner, gently offering up Dr. Hargreaves' recently removed eyeball. A few drops of blood splattered on the floor. A thin beam of white light began its scan, moving up and down behind the small screen but no familiar bleep followed.

'What's wrong?' asked Dick, with a slight panic in his voice. 'Why

isn't it working? Try it again!'

Jack held the eyeball in front of the scanner once more, but with no success.

'Perhaps a removed eyeball won't work?' offered Taylor in a slightly panicked voice. 'Maybe it needs a blood supply'.

'Great. Just great', said Dick. 'Here's exhibit "a", the eyeball and over there, ten feet away, is exhibit "b", the eyeball's former owner. Note the absence of a blood supply between "a" and "b"'.

'There's no need to be sarcastic!', said Taylor, and just as he did so, the slippery eyeball fell through Jack's fingers and on to the floor.

It bounced unpredictably a few times causing Taylor and Dick to hop around in an attempt to avoid it. In an unfortunate moment of mis-timing Dick put his left foot back on the ground just as the eyeball rolled under it. There was a squelching sound, the sound only a squashed eyeball could make.

'Now we're in trouble', said Taylor.

Dick looked at the sole of his shoe and wished he hadn't. He'd rather have stepped in dog shit with the viscosity of tar and the stickiness of superglue.

'I've got an idea', he said. 'Jack, get me the other eyeball'.

Jack dutifully went to work and removed Hargreave's other eyeball, offering it to the scanner exactly as before. The light beam moved up and down the eye, then stopped. After what seemed like an eternity, but which was, in reality, only about a second, there was a confirmatory bleep followed by the reassuring buzz and whirr of the lock.

'How were we to know it only worked on the right eye?', asked Dick. Taylor breathed a sigh of relief as he, Dick and Jack entered, Jack dragging Hargreaves' lifeless and now eyeless body with him.

'How long do you think it'll be before Hargreaves is missed?' asked Taylor.

'Well', said Dick. 'Given Maxx's probable severe state of anxiety, I'd say, about ten minutes ago. We've got to do this fast'.

While Jack used his jacket to try and clean the blood from the floor outside the room Taylor and Dick set to work behind the closed door. All the suitcases were locked so Taylor had to unpick them one by one adding considerable time to the exercise, time that was definitely not on their side.

CHAPTER 33

Insulated from the outside sounds by the heavy door they failed to hear loud shouts and a succession of guns being fired. What they did hear though was the familiar bleep, buzz and whirr of the lock.

'Jack!' shouted Dick as the door swung open. 'What's wrong?'

Maxx stepped in, closely followed by an entourage of armed security guards and technicians.

'Jack is wrong', he said, gesturing with his gun, 'And you know what? I don't think he'll ever be right'.

Facing an assortment of gun barrels, Dick and Taylor decided that discretion was definitely the better part of valour. Holding their hands above their heads they stood up rather sheepishly as if they'd been caught doing something very bad (which is of course exactly what they'd been doing). The door was now wide open and Dick could see Jack lying in a pool of his own hydraulic fluid. There was a smouldering hole in his head and two more in his chest.

'Arrest these men!', shouted Maxx in the time-honoured tradition of the cliché. 'And check for damage!'

Guards and technicians ran into the room all at the same time, which wasn't really a good idea as there wasn't enough room for everyone. In the confusion the guards handcuffed Taylor and a technician and dragged them out, while Dick found himself examining the bombs. The error was soon spotted however and the technician and Dick changed places.

'Well?' roared Maxx. 'What have these traitors done?'

The head technician looked up from the bomb he was examining and nervously answered, 'They've disabled the priming circuits'.

'On all of them?', asked Maxx angrily.

'Possibly sir', said the technician. 'But it's an easy repair to do. We can have them all checked and fixed in thirty minutes'.

'You've got ten', said Maxx. 'Starting now!'.

He breathed in deeply and counted aloud. After a while he stopped. 'I'm calmer now. You may have just noticed that I counted slowly up to twelve not ten. Do you know why I counted to twelve?'

'To make you even calmer?' Dick speculated.

Maxx kneed him in the balls and Dick doubled in agony. 'No, you fuckwit! I was counting the number of Impotence Bombs that will be launched soon, fixed and on schedule' he turned to Taylor, also being held by guards and kneed him squarely in the balls as well. 'I don't know who you are and I really don't care. What I do know though, is that you're both idiots thinking your amateur sabotage wouldn't go unnoticed'. Chuckling to himself Maxx continued. 'Disabling the

priming circuits indeed!'

Turning to face Dick, Maxx added, 'You disappoint me. You've let me down. When you cracked under the threat of torture…'

'The actual torture you mean', replied Dick. 'The actual torture that was actually and really carried out. With those terrifying wasps'.

Maxx ignored him and continued. '…I gave you a second chance. A chance to help rule our new empire. And now you've gone and thrown it all away. And all because you've let your dick rule your head. Do you know what I'm going to do to you Dick?'

'Does it by any chance involve your knee and my testicles?', asked Dick, knowing full well the answer.

'Yes it does', said Maxx, carrying out the action. As Dick doubled up again Maxx took out his gun and aimed it at Dick's groin. 'But I'm also going to kill you and your friend so you no longer pose any sort of threat to me in the future, however small'.

To Dick and Taylor's immense surprise and relief, Maxx put the gun away. Smiling he said, 'But before I do that, I still want you to have the honour of launching the bombs and experience impotence for yourself, first hand. I wouldn't want death to deprive you of that!'. Maxx addressed the guards. 'Keep these two securely locked up and bring them to the command centre just before ten'.

As the guards dragged Dick and Taylor away Maxx added, 'And keep them separated. This time I'm not taking any chances'.

- - o O o - -

A handcuffed Taylor and Dick were brought into the command centre at five to ten. It looked a bit like Houston Mission Control, Dick thought, albeit on a far smaller scale. Male and female technicians sat at consoles, flicking switches, turning dials and watching monitors. Maxx was seated on a sort of small podium where he could see all the various screens around the room while Carter was standing alert to his right.

'Gentlemen', he said smugly. 'Lose those long faces. We're about to make history. You should be happy!'

'I'm about to become impotent and then you're going to kill me. I'm sorry if I don't find that a joyous occasion', said Dick despondently. Maxx pondered this for a moment.

'Hmmmm. Perhaps you're right'. He shrugged his shoulders. 'Anyway, you'll be delighted to hear that we checked and fixed the priming circuits on each of the bombs. These have all been loaded on to the solid fuel booster rockets and transported to the various launch sites. There's only one thing we're waiting for. You'.

‘What happens if I don’t want to launch the bombs?’, enquired Dick.

‘Well, as you’re going to be killed anyway there’s no reason not to do it. However, if you do refuse then I’ll just launch them myself. Jesus Christ, Dick! You might as well have your moment of glory by pressing the damn fucking button!’

Dick looked at Taylor who shrugged. ‘He’s right Dick. Someone’s got to do it. It might as well be you’.

‘OK’, said Dick. But can you release us from these cuffs? If I’m going to be the man who launched the Impotence Bombs and changed the world, at least let me do it with a little semblance of dignity’.

Maxx sighed. ‘Very well’, he said to his guards. ‘But keep your guns trained on them at all times. If they make any sudden moves, just shoot to kill. I’m past caring’.

Dick and Taylor were released from their handcuffs and, under the watchful eyes of trigger-happy guards, took their places next to the podium. All eyes were on a large wall clock as a technician counted them down.

‘Bomb launch in thirty seconds… primers on. Fuel vents open… Guidance radar locked… launch in twenty seconds…’

Dick looked at Taylor, then at the big green button in front of him, then at a rather bosomy technician holding a clipboard who he didn’t notice when he came in.

‘…in ten seconds… All systems go… Gantries removed…’

Dick flexed his fingers, then made a fist with his right hand. He stared at Maxx who just smiled,

‘…in five… four… three…’

Dick clenched his fist even tighter.

‘…two… one…’

Dick brought his fist down on the green button.

‘Bombs launched!’

Yelps and cheers filled the room. Three people wearing hats threw them into the air. The one person wearing a wig threw that in the air. Anyone without a hat or a wig just jumped up and down in celebration. Maxx grabbed Dick by the shoulders and kissed him energetically on both cheeks. He shook Taylor’s hand vigorously, and beamed proudly at his staff.

The monitors displayed images of the twelve missiles carrying the bombs blasting off from their launch sites. There were absolutely no problems or glitches as they simultaneously arced gracefully and serenely into the clear night sky. Dick thought it was odd watching them so remotely. You couldn’t hear the roar of the rocket engines or feel the shudder or vibrations from the launch pads. Seeing them on the screens made Dick feel strangely detached from the whole event.

The excitement had died down as the technician began his second countdown. This next stage in the launch process was automatic. Dick had done his job. All he had to do next was wait for the warheads to explode and feel the effects of the radiation.

'Impotence bombs detonating in ten… nine…', the technician announced.

Dick looked oddly calm. What was about to happen was now totally out of his control. He and Taylor exchanged worried glances.

'…five… four… three… two… one…'

There was a flash of light in all of the monitors as the warheads exploded. This was followed almost immediately by more cheering and throwing of hats (the man who threw his wig in the air the first time lost it behind a heavy filing cabinet so he was unable to throw it again).

Maxx consulted his pocket watch. 'With the current wind speed and direction, we in London should experience the full effect of the gamma radiation in about thirty seconds'.

The room was deathly quiet. People were nervous. No one knew what sudden impotence would feel like. Would it be a dull sort of numbing sensation like pins and needles or would it hurt? If so, how painful would it be? Men looked at their groins in anticipation. It was a technician called Hugo who felt the result of the gamma radiation first. He felt a slight tingling followed by an overwhelming desire to jump on top of the female technician standing next to him, and grind his crotch into hers. A slightly built man called Albert was next. He undid his flies and started masturbating violently using both hands. One of the burly guards had put down his gun and was sucking the toes of a colleague, while Louise and Chloe, two launch assistants, had their hands up each other's skirts.

Maxx looked around him to see stuffy technicians and disciplined security guards shaking off any and all inhibitions. The room looked less like a control centre and more like the last days of the Roman Empire.

'What… what's happening here?' Maxx asked in a rather high and worried voice. He glared accusingly at Dick and Taylor and turned to Carter for reassurance. This was unforthcoming since Carter had his tongue down the throat of a twenty year-old female technician.

'Your technicians were absolutely right when they said that the priming circuits had been damaged', Dick said.

'And they obviously managed to fix them', added Taylor.

'Then what's gone wrong?' asked Maxx, looking worriedly around at the orgy that was taking place in front of his very eyes.

'Well', explained Dick. 'The disabled priming circuits were just a decoy'.

‘We sabotaged something else in the bomb that was much harder to detect’, added Taylor. ‘It was the radiation polarity control. All we did was switch two wires around to reverse it’.

‘That meant’, added Dick, ‘The radiation that’s been emitted over the whole country has affected the brain in a different way. It’s modified neurons in the limbic system…’

‘In particular, in the somatosensory cortex’, added Taylor.

Maxx stared wide-eyed in horror as Dick continued, ‘In this way the weapon has been transformed from being an Impotence Bomb…’

‘Into a libido bomb’. Maxx completed the sentence for Dick and slumped back in his chair in traumatic shock.

Now the whole population would be horny and there was no way to reverse it. Maxx broke down and cried like a baby as he contemplated the consequences. The whole country was sexually aroused and there was he, completely unable to get a stiffy.

Taylor and Dick hugged each other, which was quite embarrassing as both of them had quite large erections. Dick turned round to see the technician with the clipboard standing right in front of him, now without her lab coat. She ran her tongue over full rich red lips and ripped open her blouse to reveal her firm 34C bosom.

Dick looked down at the large bulge in his trousers. He smiled and thought to himself that after everything he’d been through, things were definitely on the up.

THE END

About the Author

Mark Leigh has had 40 humour books published including the phenomenally successful 'The Complete Revenge Kit' and titles co-written with Adrian Edmondson, Jeremy Beadle, Julian Clary, Rolf Harris, Chris Tarrant, Des Lynam and even Roy Chubby Brown.

His TV credits include scriptwriting for Rory Bremner, Joe Pasquale, Hale & Pace, Russ Abbot, Brian Conley and Noel Edmonds. He has also co-written two full-length film scripts which he is in the process of developing. 'Dick Longg, Sexual Saviour of the Universe' is Mark's first novel.

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